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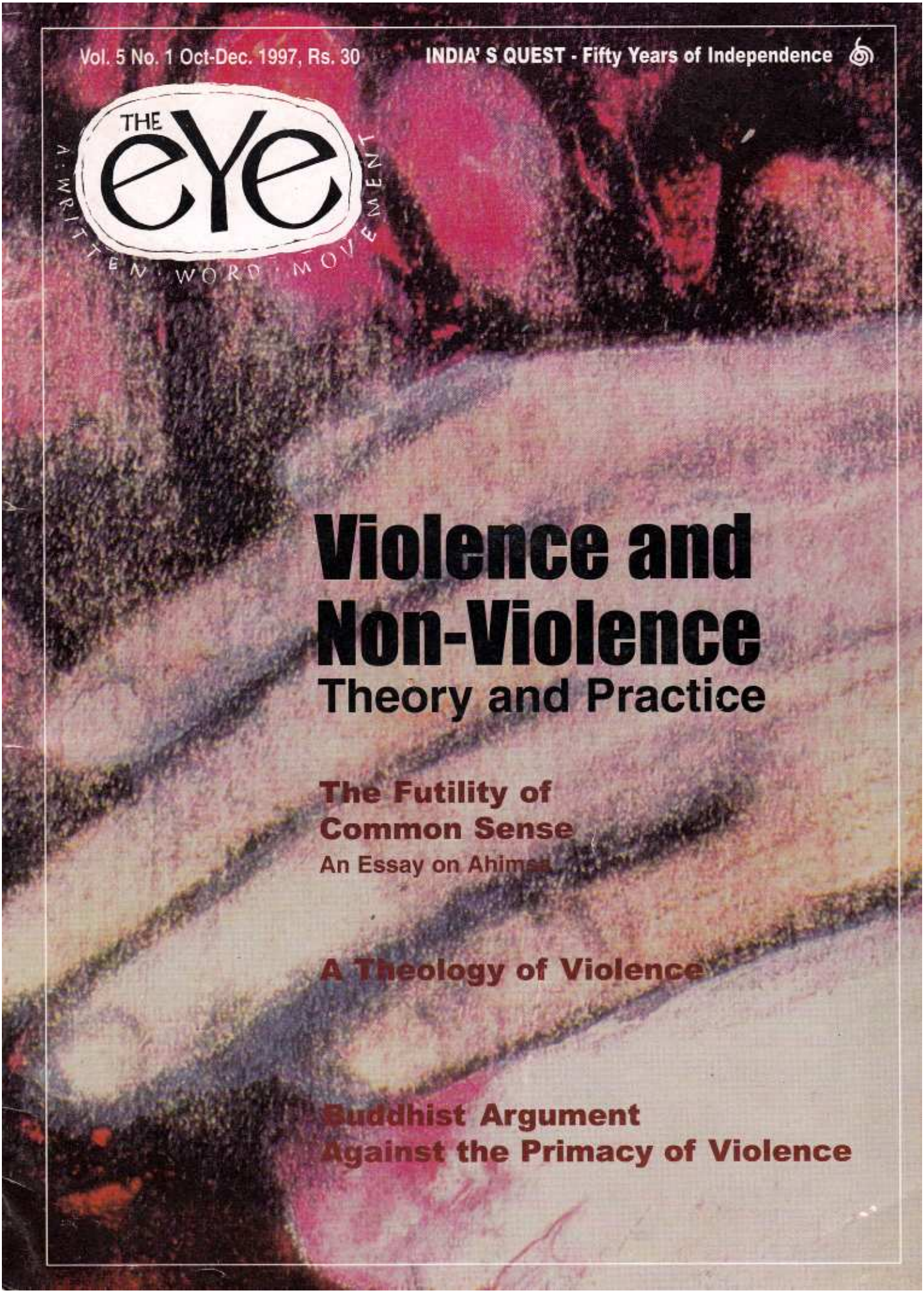
INDIA' S QUEST - Fifty Years of Independence



THE eYe
A WRITTEN WORD MOVEMENT

Violence and Non-Violence

Theory and Practice

The Futility of Common Sense
An Essay on Ahimsa

A Theology of Violence

Buddhist Argument Against the Primacy of Violence

Flying female warriors

PRABHAKAR BEGDE

Illustration: **Indrani Sen**

Art has always mirrored life. Violence within and without has been recognised as part of the human condition, and consequently enshrined in the artistic traditions of the country. Sculpture is no exception. In our series called Sculpture of the Issue, the author picks out four fierce and awesome aspects of the divine, radiating righteous energy, primarily to depict the dwarfing of the negative and reinstating the positive. The end of violence is signified in the peace of liberation or moksha.

Flying female warriors,
Chandella, 11th century AD, Sandstone 47cm, Archaelogical Museum, Khajuraho, Madhya Pradesh

Violence is the outcome of the *raudra* (furious) sentiment which arises from an enduring emotional state of anger. Sage Bharata, who enunciated the theory of *rasa*, traces its origin to '*rakshasas, danavas* and haughty men' and states that 'it is caused by fights'. The determinants that give rise to this sentiment include 'rage, abuse, insults, untrue allegations, extorting, threatening, revengefulness, jealousy and the like'. Its actions consist of 'beating, breaking, crushing, fighting, drawing of blood, and similar other deeds'. The manifestations of *krodha* (anger) include 'red eyes, knitting of eyebrows, defiance, biting of lips, movement of cheeks, pressing of one hand with the other and the like'.

Bharata classifies anger into five categories—'Anger caused by enemies, superior persons, lovers, servants and feigned anger'. Each is differently expressed in sculpture.

Battles in the air have been described in Hindu mythology and, like many other mythical themes, have been beautifully sculpted by Chandella sculptors. In this sculpture, female warriors are the *vidhyadharas* (lit. bearers of knowledge) and are shown devoid of any wings. They are depicted in a truly human mould, moving gracefully, engaged in some kind of war dance. Both sport the *keshabandha* hairstyle in authentic classical fashion. They do not wear war clothing but the female attire of the period. The figure on the left holds a mace, the one on the right a sword. It is evident that the intention and purpose here is not only to depict a fight but highlight the sinuous contours of the female body. Even the facial expressions hardly suggest any real attitude of animosity, rather they suggest a mock fight, a fake display of anger.

Cover visual:
Painting by Shuvaprasanna,
Courtesy: SAHMAT

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A SPIC MACAY PUBLICATION

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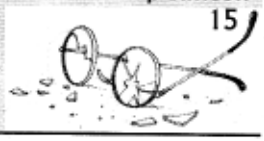

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INDIA'S QUEST

Why is the great voice of India silent?
Her ancient soul, the murmuring of her heart
Outflowing from between the crevices of rocks,
Rumbling within the outburst of monsoon clouds?
Oh, where is India's secret voice gone?
In which nook or cranny is her giant mind hid?
Like tumbling zones of fire did the mantras
Sung from time immemorial in the scriptures resound,
Like the placid surface of a lake
Bespeaks the myriad forms of life, which flash, throb, flow beneath its surface.
Is India dead in pursuit of vain strivings?
Is India lost in quest of its own soul? Is India asleep?
No, India is awake in the toil of the plough man
And the housewife over her woodfire;
India is awake in the restlessness of her people;
India is awake in the tears and laughter of her poor.
For India's soul, wealth is her poverty,
Her spirit of quiet independence,
Her dedication to truth,
For her voice comes from deep within,
The one true God who manifests in every stone and tree
And lives in the heart's mind!

Bulu Imam

A logo must convey the essence of what it represents.
INDIA'S QUEST, is a path: a search. The being on this path of unending search is of far greater import than its beginning or the summit. The hand drawn spiralling brush stroke of the logo besides having a humanistic quality of form, attempts to convey this continuum.

Neelima Rao

INDIA'S QUEST

50TH ANNIVERSARY OF INDEPENDENCE

As India celebrates fifty years of its independence, it is inevitably a time for reflection and re-affirmation. What it is to be Indian? What is the heritage that defines us and frees us from colonial rule? What value does it have in a shrinking inter-dependent world?

INDIA'S QUEST, in this historic year, wishes to address a section of our society, largely ignored by most, except of course, the market. This section constitutes the youth of this country who are only long-distance witnesses to the entire freedom struggle. How much reflection do we see among them on concepts such as 'freedom' and 'democracy'? Can an individual quest for 'success' override the need for a collective national quest? Does our system of education take upon itself the responsibility of inculcating a moral order and laying the groundwork for an upright, enlightened citizenry? And for those who are not thinking beyond their lifetimes, it is this segment of today's youth who will constitute and direct the course of our nation in the years to come.

So INDIA'S QUEST is a two year project conceived to reach the young. It will employ the print and audio-visual media and carry out a fairly large campus outreach programme. The project will be spearheaded by SPIC MACAY Publications and FUR—THE FOUNDATION FOR UNIVERSAL RESPONSIBILITY OF HIS HOLINESS, the Dalai Lama.

SPIC MACAY (Society for Promotion of Indian Classical Music and Culture Amongst Youth) has, for over two decades, been active in the student world, inculcating a sense of responsibility in young people to protect their culture. FUR has been working towards promoting a dialogue between different religious faiths and developing a sense of secular values in the young.

The primary objective of INDIA'S QUEST is to initiate discourse in the campus on seven vital national and global themes. They are:

1. **Cultural/Political/Religious Pluralism**—To present the complexity of pluralism in India and to stress on the co-existence and threat of militancy and homogeneity.
2. **Governance**—An exploration of polity, nationhood, responsible citizenship, leadership and the definitions of democracy.
3. **Education**—The dangers of a hand-me-down education system, the differences between information, knowledge and wisdom.
4. **Sustainable Development/Environment/Technology/Livelihood**—An exploration of the meaning of work, the state of the environment, of the role of technology in the lives of young citizens.
5. **Universal Responsibility and Non-violence**—Within and outside the individual. A look at violence, fragmentation and isolation. Conflict as part and parcel of modern life. A search for the right moral order through truth, justice and responsibility.
6. **Sacred India**—A metaphysical look at the human condition, tradition and modernity, aspirations of the youth in modern India.
7. **Gender**—The predicament and challenges for the contemporary Indian woman and man. A survey of what the future holds in terms of empowerment.

We hope that our readers will contribute towards making these themes a part of the national discourse and join us by making INDIA'S QUEST their own.

For more details contact THE EYE at its editorial office.

INDIA'S QUEST

Our Scholars and Film Makers

GENDER
Scholar: Dr. Tanika Sarkar
Film-maker: Vasudha Joshi

GOVERNANCE
Scholars: Dr. Rajeev Bhargava
Dr. Niraja Gopal Jayal
Film-maker: Sanjay Kak

PLURALISM
Scholar: Dr. Ashis Nandy
Film-maker: Pankaj Butalia

EDUCATION
Scholars: Dr. Raghava Menon
Dr. S. Anandalakshmy
Film-makers: RAQS Media Collective

ENVIRONMENT
Scholars: Dr. Vandana Shiva
Dr. John Kurien
Film-makers: Tenzing Sonam
Ritu Sarin

NON-VIOLENCE
Scholar: Dr. Dilip Simeon
Film-maker: Amar Kanwar

SACRED INDIA
Scholar: Dr. Makarand Paranjape
Film-maker: Rajiv Mehrotra

Project Directors

Rajiv Mehrotra
Secretary
FOUNDATION FOR UNIVERSAL RESPONSIBILITY

Rukmini Sekhar
Editor
THE EYE, a SPIC MACAY Publication

ABOUT OUR SCHOLAR FOR THIS ISSUE
Dilip Simeon
Dr. Dilip Simeon is a historian, who has taught both in India and abroad. He has authored *The Politics of Labour under Late Colonialism: Workers, Trade Unions and the State in Chotanagpur, 1922 – 1939*. Besides economic and labour history, he has written articles and lectured on the perceptions of the nation and community in contemporary India, ethnic identities, and communalism. He has addressed international meetings on subjects as varied as new democratic forms in Europe, European nuclear disarmament, and religion and morality. He is Member, Board of Counsulting Editors of *International Labour and Working Class History* and is a founding member of The Indian Labour History Association. Since 1984, Dr. Simeon has been involved in the struggle against communalism and is a founder member of the Sampradayikta Virodhi Andolan.

ABOUT OUR FILM-MAKER
Amar Kanwar
Amar Kanwar is a graduate from Jamia Milia, Delhi. He has carved a niche for himself as a film-maker. He has worked extensively on varied issues, and his documentaries have been screened in many film festivals. He has to his credit, award winning documentaries like *On the Edge of Time*, *Echoes from the Work Site* and *Talash*. His film *A Season Outside* has won the Golden Conch Award for Best Film at the 5th Mumbai International Documentary, Short and Animation Film Festival in March 1998. It has also won the Best Film Award at the recently concluded All India UGC-CEC Educational Film Festival, March 1998.

ABOUT THE FILM
A Season Outside

A Season Outside is a documentary about conflict, violence and non-violence. It is a journey through one person and several generations, through borders and different time zones...wandering through lines of separation, violence and hope...sifting through nameless people, communities and nations...

The documentary in the form of a first person essay travels through different zones and dimensions of conflict. It is a story about looking outside and within, of introspection and analysis as it searches for a wisdom that could help transform conflict.

This issue of THE EYE has been made possible by the FOUNDATION FOR UNIVERSAL RESPONSIBILITY of His Holiness the Dalai Lama

EDITORIAL

'Violence signals the end of conversation, blurs our sense of time, cause and effect and feeds upon itself...

writes Dilip Simeon in the opening article of this issue. Though this may be true of violence, to believe that the opposite of violence would not be so is to wrap up the concept of non-violence in a neat little package. For, as we walked with our authors through the hidden labrynths of violence, we were to discover the inevitability of it in our lives. In the broadest possible sense, cannot every act of change be seen as an act of violence—the bursting of seed from its pod, the impregnation of a womb and the event of birth? 'Change comes from the active principle constitutive of nature', writes Gispert Sauch, 'but it comes as a disturbance of an established calm'. Once we have acquainted ourselves with the wider metaphysics of violence, we need to turn our gaze towards history, the pages of which are often splashed with red.

In India, non-violence is religion, legend and history. Recently, a small man who walked very fast and who went by the name of Gandhi made the subject fashionable and famous. So, even as non-violence becomes the myth that sustains our subcontinent, we are faced with the reality of violence so integral to modern living. What is this contradictory pull between theory and praxis? Probably, the only way to understand non-violence is to understand what encompasses violence.

So we stepped out of Gandhi the man into the tumble and froth of contemporary society to explore the dark alleys of violence. Along the sides of these alleys hung several portraits of this highly complex entity, and these eventually became our articles.

Staring at us in the face was the violence of institutionalised control, hegemony and power. Those school textbooks produced by state education councils that foster a status-quoist, pro-establishment system smacks of violence, as does the truth-producing machinery of the ruling elite which produces its own brand of truth, communicated by its own private channels of control. We must also not overlook what Aditya Nigam calls 'epistemic violence', where the world of knowledge becomes yet another area of struggle (read violence), and matters are settled through power and not rational argument. Healing and health suffer the whiplash of pharmaceuticalisation and genetic engineering and much of technology is ubiquitiously violent, not relegated merely to the horrors of a Hiroshima or Auschwitz, but woven into the warp and weft of a simple cotton shirt. *Gutter Syndrome* is the personal story of a young man who sees a roadside telephone box with perhaps a million wires strangling each other and wonders at the aggression packed within—and also within himself.

In a radical departure from conventional theories on violence, G. N. Devy links sources of violence to sources of creativity. Here's a provocative line, '...the gratification of desire in excess of requirement could make one violent. Strangely, this was the explanation that Tagore gave for creativity.' If indeed this is somewhat passionate, Buddhism's counsel for control of *himsa* is more subdued, embodied in the persona of the Bodhisattva, who, as a leader, lays down his life for his followers. Practice of the dharma perfected by meditation and ethical conduct is the only way to be non-violent. However, even an 'ism' like Buddhism can spark off sectarian violence as Sulak Sivaraksa, the fiery activist from Thailand mentions in the course of our conversation.

But like a wounded animal, humanity retreats every once in a while to lick its own wounds and heal itself. In the quiet shade of the thought-tree, remedies emerge. From the aftermath of South Africa's bloody apartheid struggle, emerges the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which places a premium on forgiveness. The search for giving a voice to the victim is on. I conclude with a quotation from Simeon, 'Society will always pay a price for the humiliation of any of its constituents—even if these effects take centuries to work themselves out'. Can we make these centuries a little shorter and more peaceful?

Lakshmi Sekhar

LETTERS

Dear Editor,

I am moved to comment on the excess emphasis on 'light' in David Frawley's article called 'Surya—the Solar-Dawn Religion of Enlightenment', *The Development Saga, (Vol.4, No.4)*. To me, this is synonymous with light as leading one from ignorance to enlightenment, and I feel this to be highly misplaced. Development seen as taking people from darkness to light—and the whole bogus bandwagon of the Aryan civilising of India's tribal populations—should be seen as anti-human. It pre-supposes tribals to be living in states of ignorance or darkness.I do not approve of the piece in the context of this issue. I have no war against Frawley's literal transliteration of Vedic texts.

The evolution of life has to be viewed with great compassion for life. Scholars like David Frawley, interpreting the Vedas,will have us believe that 'In the beginning was the ignorance, the indefinable ground of the cosmos-psyche, its burgeoning chaos.Yet this ignorance had an intelligence; it was the intelligence of chaos, a self-defensive clinging to an obstinate and unjustified resistance to growth and evolution... it was the being of ignorance and misconception that could only imagine true conception as self-annhilation.' This characterises Muetter's assertion that the Vedas were 'the first words of Aryan man.'

I have to say that I disagree with such a belief. It demotes nature in my opinion from its role as Mother to nihil. It is perhaps the westerner in Frawley finding self-justification in patriarchal scriptures. But it is bad reasoning.

In nature there is neither ignorance nor wisdom, and is a creation of human consciousness—the very idea of the enlightened mind is a mental idea; and as for light in the centre of the world being worshipped as a manifestation of inner light, it is an outdated religiousness. The worship of the sun was *adopted* by our tribes, it was not their original druid conception through which they worshipped the tree. Hindus worship the sun. In order to make missionisation succeed, tribals were made to accept the sun as a deity, which was easy since the tribals worship everything in nature; and then in an unguarded moment, the sun was equated directly with Jesus and Singbonga, the Sun god, portrayed as a man having a wife and two dogs—a human figure, was immediately christianised by theology.

In defence of tribal cosmology I have to present the following hypothesis of their cosmology as I have understood it. They conceive of power in the lifeless, and hence in the so-called ignorant non-living material substance, and they recognise its power as being beyond intelligence and self-realisation—the original cosmic matrix from which *life* emerged. Now I think I must disassociate 'life' from intelligence and wisdom and spirituality, all the so-called higher prerogatives of human beings!

To the tribal, life is something different. It is the existence of something in a cosmic space, and the closer we feel to it, whether in touching non-living or intelligent things, the closer we are to this deity of non-living—the earth or the 'basely alive', such as the plant world. This is essential to understanding why tribals remain and choose to remain so completely 'unevolved' because they actually cherish and treasure their very primitiveness and backwardness.

I celebrate this backwardness, and wish to place before my reader, the view of evolution in this craving for light, speed and the truly self-destructive principle of greed based on the principle of the 'victory of light over darkness, being over non-being, life over death, and knowledge over ignorance. It is this which plunges mankind into a quest for the ultimate sunlight of materialism, science and voyeurism—a landscape where reality itself ceases and exists only in simulated states. This will end our species and return us to the original cycle of being which continues its slow growth. The human species will have passed another cyclic epoch in its long, unknown past. The Sun God of the *Rig Veda* is the God of modernity. The same is true of the Egyptians.

To learn to find a higher intelligence in Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*, 'The unlit temple of eternity' before the dawn, is perhaps a supremely tribal yearning. It is in this dark where abode the gods and goddess of the tribal world. And it is very hard for the modern mind, drunk as it is on light, to find them!

Bulu Imam
'Sanskriti'
P.O. Hazaribagh
Bihar - 825 301

Gautam Haridas, who reviewed David Frawley's book for THE EYE, responds to Mr. Imam's letter.

Dear Mr. Imam

This is a reply to your letter. The previous issue of THE EYE contained, in addition to the extract from David Frawley's *Wisdom of the Ancient Seers*, a review of the same book. I am the reviewer. Permit me to contend that Frawley intended no deceiving interpretation or dismissal of the tribal ethos. Nor was it, I assert, a contempt of mother nature that led him to assert the primacy of spirit. The realm of the spirit need not be equated with the modern intelligence of 'speed, science and materialism.' Spirit and matter in Frawley's analysis are indeed connected, but not in the sense of a dependence of spirit on matter. If anything, it is the other way round. Matter comes in the way of the spirit due to its hardness, its crudeness and needs to be *accepted* before it can be understood. In this, the voyeurism of science has failed entirely.

The primitiveness of tribal living has an undeniable core of beauty and authenticity. But Frawley views reality differently, and just as the tribals have

the right to maintain their age-old cultural roots, the seers who interpret reality from an internal perspective, also have the right to transcend nature. The tribal life is no doubt beautiful but to assert it as the only definition of beauty against any other revelations would amount to a position of dogma that refutes reason.

Non-tribal spiritual traditions also define darkness as beautiful. Kali is a dark symbol of spiritual consciousness. There is nothing 'outdated' about outer light representing inner light and wisdom. It is only a concrete symbol.

'Unlit temple of eternity' has no bearing whatsoever on the tribal way of life. It is related to the unmanifested state of creation. Night, say the Vedic seers, conceals day in her bosom. Aurobindo is the mystic whose works are pervaded by the seeking and yearning for light, the 'the divine sunlight possessed by the streams of Truth.' It is unfair to isolate a single sentence to make it exemplify a creed that was alien to his philosophy and spirituality. I submit, with due respect, that 'light' is an often used word in the evolution of the seeking individual, the *sadhak*. This, I hope, will exonerate Frawley from your accusation.

Gautam Haridas
New Delhi

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Join the thought movement by visiting us at our Website at

http://www.internetindia.com/theeye

Its just great to see volunteers put together some of the best literary work in an awesome magazine like this.
I believe THE EYE is unique!

Mehul Parekh
USA

I would love to be part of such a magazine which is reputable, mind- expanding and helpful in many ways

Stella Giannitsi
Athens

Courtesy Pure Tech India Ltd., Mumbai

READ THE BACK ISSUES OF THE EYE

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Walking tall

Vol. II No.3
Seed Yatra

Vol. III No.3
In Search of Wisdom

Vol. III No.4
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Vol IV No.4
The Development Saga
A View from beyond the Edge

We dedicate this issue of THE EYE to

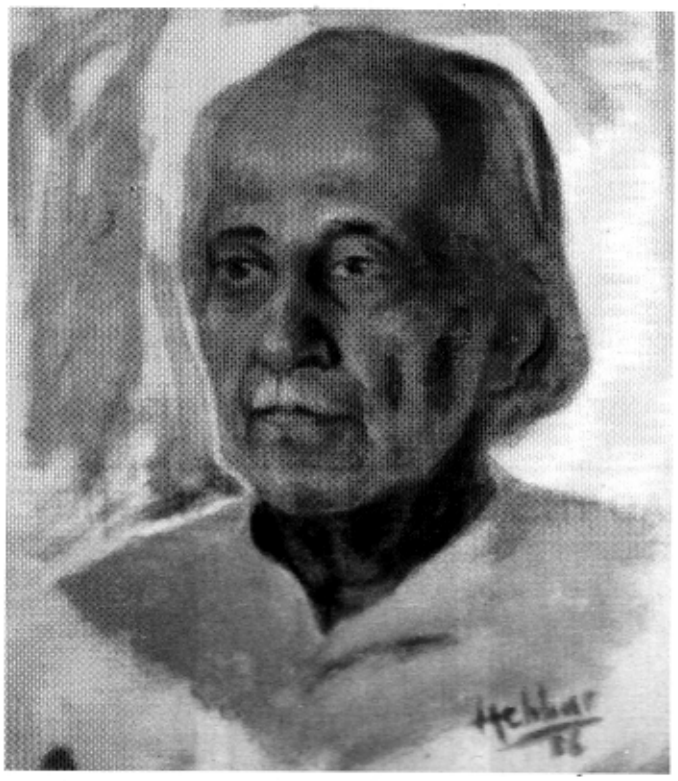
KOTA SHIVARAM KARANTH

(Born: 1902 Died: 1997)

IN CONVERSATION WITH U.R.ANANTHAMURTHY

'Writer, educationist, Yakshagana artiste, film-maker, environmentalist, social thinker, rationalist, orator—he was truly a Renaissance man.'

Jayanth Kodkarni, *The Times of India.*



Painting by K. K. Hebbar

The departure of Shivaram Karanth is a loss, not only to the world of letters, but all of society. For he was a colossus, striding over several worlds, chopping down archaic dogmas and pleading for humane values. When I last spoke to him it was at a book release function in New Delhi, early last year. Even then, at ninety-something the verve and spirit of this grand old man was something to be marvelled at. At the drop of a hat, he would sing or dance. He could be immensely and profoundly witty as only the wise can be.

Karanth's literature was peopled by those he was intimately in touch with—the simple village folks of Dakshina Kannada. All his major books, ***Chomana Dudi, Mookajjiya Kanasugalu, Alida Mele, Marali Mannige or Bettada Jeeva,*** *are authentic and compassionate portrayals of his life's experiences. Apart from his outstanding contribution to literature for which he received the Jnanpith Award, Karanth has played a major role in revitalising the folk arts of his region, primarily, Yakshagana. Being an innovator and iconoclast, it is not surprising that he incurred the wrath of several purists and orthodox traditionalists. His commitment to the environment and the political life of the nation took up much of his later day energies. He even contested parliamentary elections as a Green Candidate. In 1993, the Ministry of Environment, Government of India, honoured him with the Indira Gandhi Paryavaran Puraskar. In a (not so) surprising move, Karanth returned his Padma Bhushan award to protest against the Emergency.*

I have always wanted to interview Shivaram Karanth for THE EYE, but that could never be somehow. But, a conversation is indeed what we present here—an extract from a longer one with U. R. Ananthamurthy, another great Kannada writer, who explores in his own inimitable way, the many insights on life that made up this grand old man.
THE EYE dedicates this issue to him. This interview has been translated from the Kannada by Manu Chakravarthy

The Editor

Ananthamurthy: I think that it is not right to engage you in a conversation purely on literature. Your interests are so varied, and one cannot ignore your tremendous contribution to science, politics, Yakshagana, literature, children's education, painting. Besides all these, during the Emergency, your vibrant political activism is only too well known to all. May I ask if you think India has moved into a phase of hope now?

Karanth: I only feel that we have left behind a disastrous state. It is not at all possible to say if the country has moved into a better period until one has had a good and clean government that has lasted quite some time, doing the right things with a proper plan. I would not say anything beyond this, for the experience of 1947 is still with me. I had believed that independence had ushered in an era of hope for all of us. All that hope and promise has dwindled gradually.

URA: I raise the question only because I am interested in finding out what correlation exists between your desire for democracy and your preoccupations as a novelist.

SK: I really do not belong to a particular slot as a novelist. In fact, I would like to be considered a writer whose life blends with the very life of the country and who is deeply affected by whatever affects the land and its people. Consequently, a calamity that affects the country affects me equally. I cannot create anything staying outside this unified relationship.

URA: But, sir, consider the fact that we have so many musicians, dancers, painters and sculptors who do not respond to a social and political crisis as a writer does. Is there any link between the medium of the artiste and his/her preoccupations?

SK: When the question of individual freedom arises, there is indeed a relationship between the artiste and the medium. You do not much deal with ideas in dance, music and painting. The main focus here is on emotions. But I would say that the struggle for freedom has mattered enormously to painters and sculptors whenever they felt their emotions were being stifled by an oppressive system or when their creative expressions was being hampered by a totalitarian state. This has actually happened in France. There is indeed no doubt that artistes working in different media have fought for their freedom.

URA: I agree. Picasso, for instance…

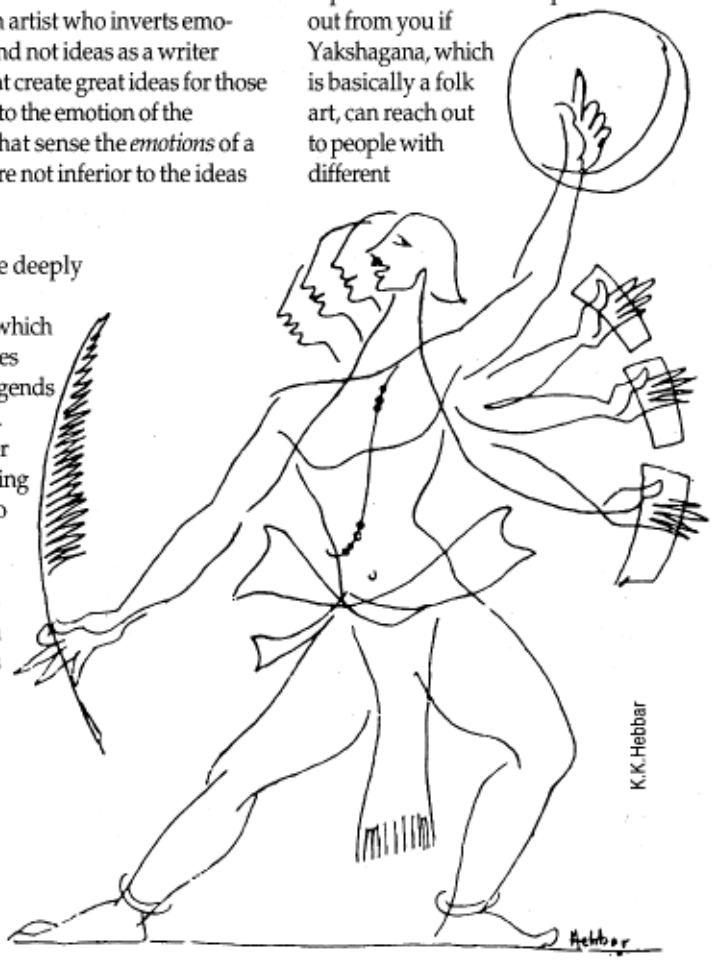
SK: Not just Picasso. This has happened even from the days of the Renaissance. The evolution of different styles indicates the struggle for freedom. It is a pointer to the fight against tyranny; style as narrowly determined by orthodoxy; indifference of the people at large and many such crippling social and political configurations.

However, there is a difference in 'form' and 'pressure' in the fight for freedom between a writer and an artist. For instance, for somebody like Rodin, a slave may suggest the theme of 'tearing of bondage', which might appear to be common place material for the common people. But an artist who inverts emotions on it—and not ideas as a writer would—might create great ideas for those who respond to the emotion of the medium. In that sense the *emotions* of a visual artist are not inferior to the ideas of a writer.

URA: You are deeply interested in Yakshagana, which mostly revolves around our legends and folk tales. Have you ever considered using Yakshagana to disseminate social and political ideas and your own rational views as a novelist and writer?

SK: This is essentially a question concerning the nature of the medium. Yakshagana is basically a dance form, the costumes and music of which evolved along with the evolution of the medium itself. Actually I have used this medium as an experiment to try out many other things. But then it requires a realistic costume. I have produced pieces called *Day-Night* and *The Ripple of the River* that had altogether different thematic concerns. With changes in music and costumes, the medium no longer remains pure Yakshagana, which has such a mythological world around it. The mythological universe that determines the music, costumes and emotional content of Yakshagana would vanish if one were to situate it in a very different world with very different components of beliefs. It is not that Yakshagana cannot be used to represent other situations, but it would no longer be itself. But on a minor scale, I have attempted such things.

URA: Do you think Yakshagana has the potential to lend itself to different experiments? I raise this question to find out from you if Yakshagana, which is basically a folk art, can reach out to people with different



kinds of messages.

SK: The form of Yakshagana might grow in relation to music and dance, and even this statement of mine is tentative for I can answer this emphatically only after I have mastered the musical form as a creator. But I still feel there would be a transformation of its basic features when this medium is used to serve other purposes.

As far as the people are concerned, they understand everything even without my commentary, for they know the story only too well. They can readily respond to the emotions of the narrative. As far as experiments are concerned, I really do not know how successful I would be with an audience that is not steeped in that tradition. I have, on an occasion, conducted an experiment with a story, composing the songs on my own and even dancing out the necessary bits. To this day, I cannot measure the success or failure of that experiment, for the audience did not seem to understand what I was attempting. No art form can make an impact on the people if the basic medium is not understood. This seems to be an essential condition of art application itself.

URA: Sir, I must place on record my profound respect for you as a writer who has never hesitated to speak out the truth, whatever the nature of the circumstances. At the same time, your refusal to utter what you are not convinced of, has always ensured your freedom of spirit and absolute purity of conscience. My respect and admiration for you increased enormously when you returned the Padma Bhushan award to the government during the Emergency. I am convinced that your courage of conviction and honesty of expression are a vital part of your being as a writer.

SK: I do not think much of the act of returning the Padma Bhushan in the first place. The fate of the nation has always determined my actions, right from those days when I stopped going to school to join the independence movement. It was an act that went against my parents.

Ashish Khokar *Dances of India*

The mythological universe that determines the music, costumes and emotional content of Yakshagana would vanish if one were to situate it in a very different world with very different components of beliefs.

Later, it became necessary to oppose traditional beliefs and values. I have always gone by what seemed right to me. So, even when I was influenced by others—Gandhi for instance—I always kept my spirit of questioning alive. I have always found it natural to be consistently truthful in my expression, whether in action or writing, and so I returned the award as part of my natural expression.

URA: The question of sexuality came up quite early in your work, as in *Sarasammana Samadhi* (*Sarasamma's Grave*). I am sure it must have shocked your readers in those days.

SK: Nobody raised it personally with me then. But I have always been bothered by questions of morality and amorality. I tried to look for material on it all around me. I even looked up people like Malinowski and Havelock Ellis to see what they had to say on this. I did some work on studies related to animal like behaviour. This was at a time when I wanted to understand human nature seeing the human being as yet another animal. I started thinking on lines that went beyond cultural boundaries. It was only later that I turned to human nature, regarding the human being as a more developed form of life with evolved thoughts, emotions and feelings. I wrote my novel on the whirlpool of the body and the mind only to find an enactment to the answers I had shaped at that juncture. I wrote the novel with a tremendous sense of responsibility, desiring only to find out if it had a positive or a negative effect on the readers. It was a different matter altogether, whether the readers shared my perception of human nature or not. That was the effort in my work *Mai Managala Suliyalli* (roughly translated as *In the Whirlpool of Body and Mind*)

URA: One cannot but help but notice

your sympathetic attitude towards many things in your work. But why is it that you show no such sympathetic attitude towards the sanyasis that appear in your work?

URA: I think you can see sympathy at work in one or two novels, for example, in the novel *A Sanyasi's Life*. I have great sympathy for the sanyasi, at least as far as his initial search is concerned, for it is marked by great honesty. I have been guided by the living example of Ramakrishna Paramhansa. But, you see, I pick directly from life, not depending entirely on imagination, and what I have seen of life, as far as such characters are concerned, has been overwhelmingly false and deceitful. I must acknowledge that I have, in fact, come across a real mystic, a man full of love—Sadhu Vaswani. I was deeply touched by him.

However, one cannot ever overlook the phenomenon of seekers resorting to cheating, completely losing their balance and propriety on account of the overpowering adoration of their followers. This is true not just of sanyasis but also of political leaders.

URA: This only means that right from the beginning you have been reflecting on the nature of idealism in your work. The reason for this could be that like the idealists you tend....

SK: Look, I too started off as an idealist. But the limitations of human nature caused me enormous disillusionment. There was a phase when I was influenced by Gandhi. But a little later I realised that *his* idealism could not become mine. Gradually it dawned on me that there was no point in talking about ideals unless we come to terms with the limitations of human nature. It occurred to me that ideals upheld in books would not be valid in actual life. I found it necessary to understand both human limitations and possibilities. I thought it was futile to talk of my experience of life and my reactions to several things without awareness of the limits of life.

URA: Let me draw your attention to an article on you by your brother. He refers to your childhood and I found a couple of very interesting aspects there. The first reference I found interesting concerned the place you grew up in. Life in Dakshina Kannada during those days was utterly uncreative. The arrival of the British, however, created a conflict between the old world and the new. Your brother records that you grew up in that atmosphere—a fact I found very interesting. Your father wrote plays for children and was active in several ways. Then there was the whole spirit of the place—the poverty of people, the absolute honesty of the common folk, the presence of young celibates and old women—all these are recorded in that particular piece on you. It is my feeling that the characters in your books—especially young celibates and old women—come from your childhood experiences and you have always employed the 'archetypal method' of representation with such characters acting as archetypes.

SK: There are archetypes in the sense that I see such people, especially old women, in my place even to this day. They continue to keep alive the dignity of the place by their essential honest selves. And, there was poverty all over. But till now, I haven't come across one who has gone back on his word or broken a promise. I have seen such honesty among my people—the common people. The coming of the British brought education to my land, but not more than six to eight persons learnt English. So, whoever appears in my work comes directly from my life.

I am amazed by the things that constitute the universe just as I am astonished by the infinite questions that arise out of it all.

URA: I find your brother's last remark revealing. He writes that except for Yakshagana there was nothing beautiful around the place—neither beautiful temples, nor good music, nor good films ... He says there was nothing to create an aesthetic sense in that place, and adds that, in your case, the statement that quite often barrenness of life gives birth to beauty has come true ... how was it possible for you to create art out of such circumstances?

SK: Such barrenness exists there even now. The magnificent natural beauty of the place continues to remain dead for the people. I have sung, danced and attempted several kinds of things. But I don't think I can ever claim that I have done all this with an aesthetic sense. I have, in fact, indulged in all the pleasures of youth. An aesthetic sense, if any, came to me only after my twenties. At twenty-one, I roamed all over the place reading all kinds of things. My lonely wanderings exposed me to the extraordinary beauty of the uninhabited forests, mountains, and riversides and gave me great joy. I was like any other young person then. The ocean invited me to take a swim ... all these were elemental desires. I never knew then that the ocean too had a profound mood. There was nothing like a contemplative state of mind for me then. It was the constant exposure to nature that, over the years, gave me an inward sense of nature that I have tried to use in my work. It did take time for this to mature, though.

URA: Let me raise a question specifically on your work *Chomana Dudi* (*Choma's Drum*). It is argued by many that Choma is an unusual untouchable with special abilities and hence cannot be considered to be a representative of the untouchable community. They argue that you have created a unique character not quite representative of the community. It is also argued that your sympathy for the Brahmin landlord takes away radical elements from your work. You even seem to be conservative. How do you respond to this?

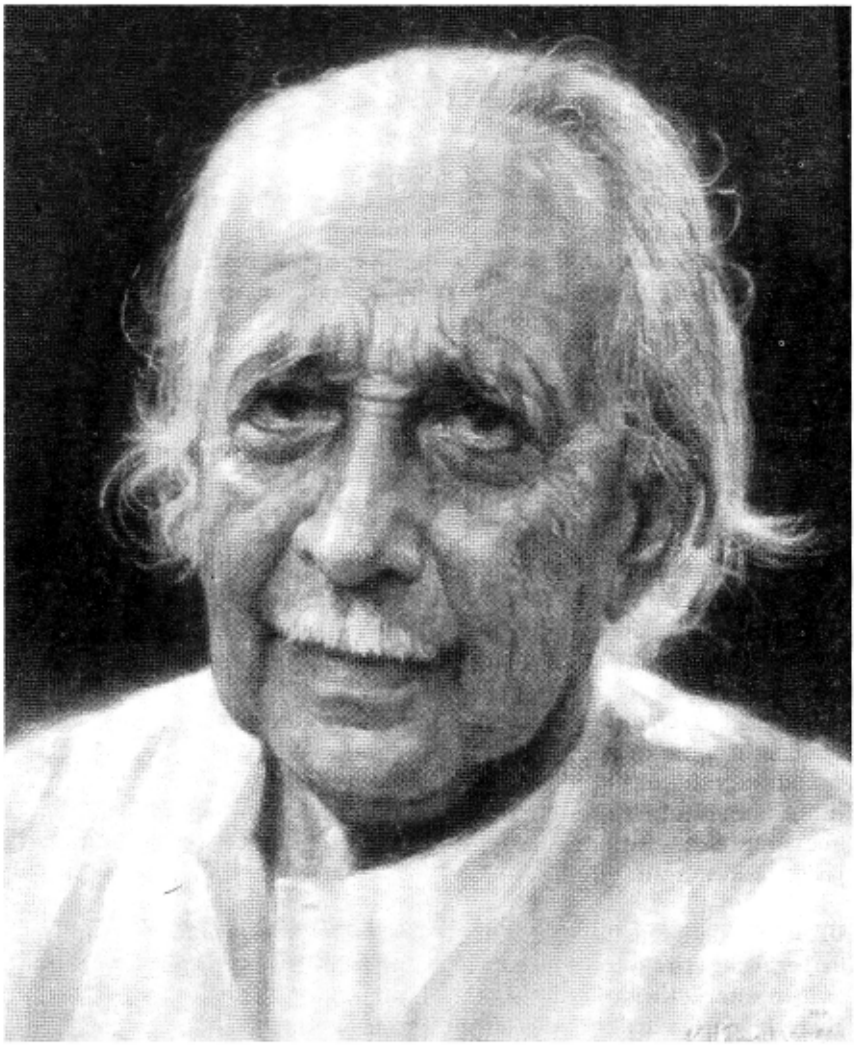
SK: There is no need for any revolution in the work, which is based, primarily, on an untouchable's desire to have a piece of land for himself. But there is an obstacle in the form of the landlord. But that doesn't make him a demon. We are all governed by traditions. Choma's desire to own a land is itself revolutionary for it is a transgression of the norms of tradition. The landlord is indeed very sympathetic, but he cannot defy social conventions. He cannot offer Choma the

land he desires, for nobody around has done such a thing. I think I have sympathy for both characters. Let us also not forget the fact that both exist in a certain historical situation which they cannot break away from.

As far as Choma's drum is concerned, there is a unified relationship between his anguish and internal confusion and the simple instrument that gives expression to all that. It is a simple instrument, but is capable of giving full expression to the man's pain and misery. There is nothing special or extraordinary about any of these.

URA: Sir, how do you respond to the statement that your recent body of work is too cerebral and philosophical and does not really deal with social and political problems as *Chomana Dudi* does.

SK: My preoccupation with poverty, suffering and the life of Harijans comes to me from those days of Gandhi. In fact, I did an intense practical study of the situation, touring thirty villages, going from house to house to find out how these people lived, what they ate and drank and how they spent their leisure hours. All these details are vivid in mind even now. I see them concretely as images. Before this, I had written a play based on my imagination. It was a work crafted by assumptions and hypothesis. A work like *Chomana Dudi*, however, is based on an actual study of the living conditions of actual people. It is for this reason that its picture is drastic. I do not think the situation has ended, nor do I believe I have given it up as part of my preoccupations in my recent work for it does deal with these problems. You see, I have gone from house to house asking people not to give leftovers to the untouchables. I have appealed to them to give the untouchables fresh food. Just a fortnight ago, I watched the untouchables eat wasted food thrown outside. The problem has not at all ended as far as I am concerned. It is just that I can't take Choma all the time to represent the untouchables. Even to this day untouchables haven't become landowners, though a few who had been working on the land for a long time have gained some of it. But the general condition remains much the same. I haven't witnessed great changes in the actual lives of the people.



Painting by K. N. Ramachandra

URA: Sir, let me raise a final question. There are many who believe you are a confirmed rationalist whose vision is limited only to the materiality of life and that it cannot grasp aspects of mysticism and intuition. During the course of your talk with me, you referred to your experience with a mystic. What have you to say of yourself in relation to all these positions?

SK: Let me be candid. The question seems to be childish to me. I have always wondered about people greater than me, the fact of the existence of this world and universe and the great mysteries of the cosmos. You call it by any name. It doesn't matter to me. Even at this stage of my life, I am stunned by new things I encounter and I only reflect on my ignorance. I am amazed by the things that constitute the universe just as I am astonished by the infinite questions that arise out of it all. If one were to ask me about the stars, the constellations, their size, length and distance, I can't answer any of those questions, for I cannot even conceive of any of those things. I don't think anybody should ask me such things. I am convinced one should find out all that deep within one's own self. I am only too overawed by the mysteries of the universe. I am very aware of the limitations of my knowledge in relation to the deep secrets of nature.

From an interview published in *Samakshama*, a collection of articles by Professor U. R. Ananthamurthy. We are grateful to Shri Marishamachar, Registrar, Karnataka Shilpakala Academy for all the pictures of Karanth.

T. Rajen Poduval, *Mathrubhumi*

MALAYATOOR RAMAKRISHNAN

DR. S. RATHI

Malayatoor Ramakrishnan, one of the most outstanding members of the Malayalam literati passed away on 28 December 1997. A multifaceted personality, he achieved excellence in myriad fields besides literature, making significant contributions painting, cartooning, sculpture and films. A brilliant student, he began his career as a magistrate before joining the bureaucracy at a later stage, which he served till 1981.

His short stories, which outnumber his novels, are very popular since he uses the components of humour and suspense with great skill. But as works of literature, his novels are more acclaimed. As a matter of fact, it is through his novels that Malayatoor Ramakrishnan has made a lasting impact on the minds of the Malayalam-reading populace. He achieved literary stardom through his semi-autobiographical novel *Verukal* (Roots), which won the Kerala Sahitya Akademi award and has been described as a 'prose epic of author's biography'.

Whether autobiographical or purely fictional, Malayatoor Ramakrishnan wrote about what he understood best: the bureaucracy and the political machinery with its attendant ills. His novel, *Yantram* (Machine), which was honoured with the prestigious Vayalar Award, deals with the highly sadistic and depressing sides of the bureaucratic machinery. In his novels *Anchu Centu* (Five Cents) and *Aaram Viral* (Sixth Finger) he portrays the political rat race and the mafia. *Service Stories* and *Brigadier Story*, marks a return to the theme of bureaucracy; these anecdotes set a new trend in narrative techniques. In *Service Stories* he exposes the failures of the bureaucracy especially his own, while *Brigadier Stories* reveals to us the heartaches of a sensitive man greatly empathetic to the common man struggling to exist in the turbulent socio-political reality. At the time of his death, Malayatoor Ramakrishnan was working on a novel in English entitled *Zamorin*.

Malayatoor's literature is marked not only with great sensitivity but is also very readable and accessible. What made Malayatoor immensely popular was his capacity to provide narrative infrastructures through word-plays and puns. His unique skill of being able to acquaint the reader with the reality subtly lying beneath the humour, sets apart his work from that of his contemporaries.

His interests were not limited to prose alone, his cartoons graced *Shankar's Weekly*, *Blitz* and *Free India*. For a short period he worked as a freelance cartoonist in *Free Press Journal*. One form of story telling is close to another, this is evident from his deep involvement in films and film-making. He wrote scripts for a few Malayalam films. His novel *Yakshi* is one such film. In 1996, he becamethe Chairman of the State Film Award Committee.

His death leaves a great void not only in the literary field but also in the larger field of art. More than all this, many have lost a genuine and true friend.

Dr. S. Rathi is Senior Lecturer at St. Xavier's College, Aluva, Kerala

ADVERTISEMENT

INDIA FOUNDATION FOR THE ARTS

India Foundation for the Arts (IFA) is an independent, professionally managed grant-making institution. Given the richness and diversity of arts practice in India, IFA seeks to provide sustenance to creativity, collaborative work, research and critical reflection.

In January 1997, IFA awarded six grants under the arts collaboration programme. The grants support initiatives across a wide range of disciplines, stimulating dialogue and exchange between, for example, urban and tribal visual artists; rural craftspersons and theatre workers; traditional and modern actors; and contemporary dancers from different regions. Project results are expected to include theatre productions, new choreography, sculptures, innovative shadow plays, educational toys, and the development of new training skills and networks for performing artists.

IFA

Arts Collaboration Programme
Request for Proposals

IFA now plans to offer a second round of grants for arts collaborations, and invites applications from individuals and organisations with an interest in initiatives that cross disciplines, genres, styles or languages in the arts.

We intend the arts to be interpreted widely to include the written, the painted, the crafted, the performed, the broadcasted and the filmed; both the traditional and the modern.

In our understanding, collaborative projects bring together two or more individuals and/or organisations as equal partners, who pool talent and resources, share leadership and outcomes, and pursue a common or new goal. We attach particular importance to proposals that respect and reflect the independent identities, concerns or viewpoints of all collaborating partners.

Collaborations may be proposed between individuals or between institutions, or between individuals and institutions, with the objective of facilitating, for example, the creation of new work and adaptations; exchange of training methods, resources, skills or practices in the arts; the strengthening of art forms in specific areas, such as their support systems, presentation techniques or reach; or the emergence of new trends and connections in the arts.

Proposals must have a clear arts objective, although they may also address other social or development goals.

This grant programme does not envisage support for projects limited to comparative or interdisciplinary research; individual fellowships/ scholarships; or training programmes, seminars and symposiums.

Application Guidelines

Proposals may be formulated in any manner that conveys project ideas and concerns effectively. Applications should, however, contain the following:

1. Brief narrative of the background and context of the proposal, and the needs, issues or opportunities it addresses.
2. Overall goals, specific objectives and rationale of the project.
3. Description of the collaborative process or the working methods to be adopted.
4. Description of the activities to be funded.
5. Work plan and administrative arrangements for the project.
6. Description of the anticipated outcome, and strategies to enhance the impact of the project.
7. Proposed duration of the project.
8. Detailed budget and explanation, including any funds anticipated from other sources.
9. Clear indication of the specific individual or registered non-profit organisation proposed as the grant recipient.
10. Work samples (e.g. literature, photographs, videos) and additional supporting materials, if any. (IFA will be unable to return any material accompanying the proposal.)
11. Details of previous collaborative undertakings, if any.
12. Biographical information for all collaborating individuals, and institutional information (name, address, legal status, main sources of funding, management and staff structure, and current activities) for all collaborating organisations.
13. Written consent of all collaborating partners.
14. Address and telephone/fax number.

All proposals must be accompanied by a summary of not more than 750 words highlighting the salient features of the project.

General Information

1. Indian nationals or registered non-profit Indian organisations are eligible to apply. Collaborating partners should also be Indian.
2. Consultants, assistants and resource persons do not qualify as collaborators.
3. Proposals may be submitted in any Indian language including English.
4. Proposals sent by fax will not be considered.
5. Support for upto Rs. 5 lakh may be requested. Proposal evaluation will take into consideration whether the budget is realistic and appropriate.
6. Support may be requested for fresh or ongoing collaborative activity. However, funds will not be available to cover costs incurred before the grant is activated.
7. Funds will be available for expenses directly related to the project, including personnel costs, activities and travel, and modest equipment and materials, if necessary. Institutional overheads, building costs and infrastructural development should not be budgeted.
8. Funds will not be available to pay for performances, exhibitions, installations, screenings, publications or international travel. However, tryout performances and other presentations that serve as a feedback mechanism, or form part of the collaborative process in other ways, may be considered for funding.
9. Requests for support to present or disseminate project results may be considered at a later stage, following an evaluation.
10. The duration of the project may be one year or less.
11. Shortlisted applicants may be invited for an interview and/or to respond to evaluations. IFA staff or consultants may also make site visits to gain a better appreciation of the proposed project.
12. An advisory panel will help determine grant awards, and the decision of IFA will be final.

IFA staff will be glad to discuss proposal development, and respond to draft proposals or questions regarding this grant programme. Written enquiries should reach IFA one month prior to the deadline for applications.

Timetable

Applications should reach IFA by June 30, 1998. Grant awards will be announced on or before November 30, 1998.

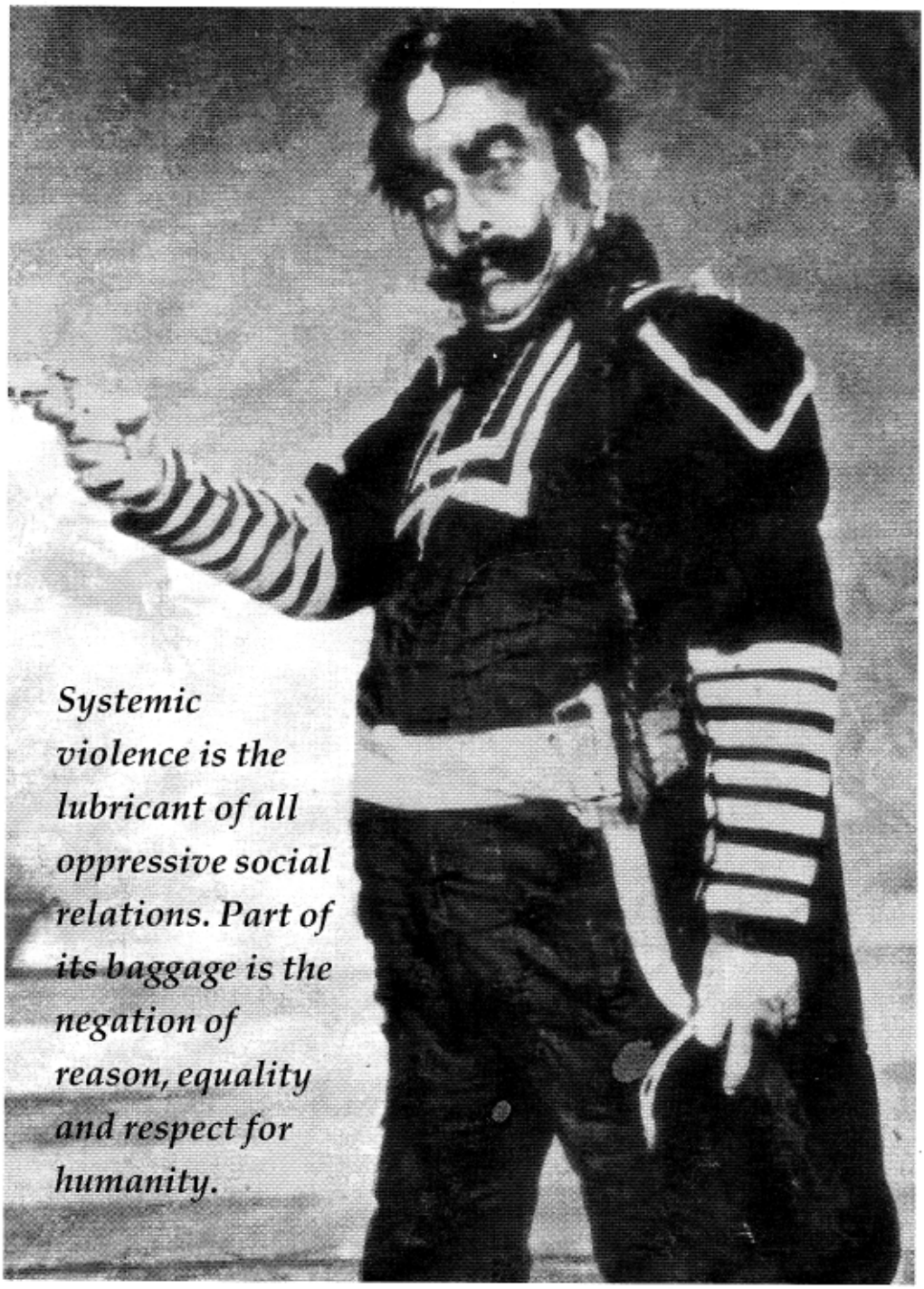
Applications and all other communications should be addressed to:

The Executive Director
India Foundation for the Arts
Tharangini, 12th Cross
Raj Mahal Vilas Extension
Bangalore - 560 080
Tel/Fax: +91 (80) 331 0584 / 331 0583

THE FUTILITY OF COMMON SENSE

AN ESSAY ON AHIMSA

DILIP SIMEON



Systemic violence is the lubricant of all oppressive social relations. Part of its baggage is the negation of reason, equality and respect for humanity.

Courtesy: Natarang Prathishtan, *Folio, The Hindu*

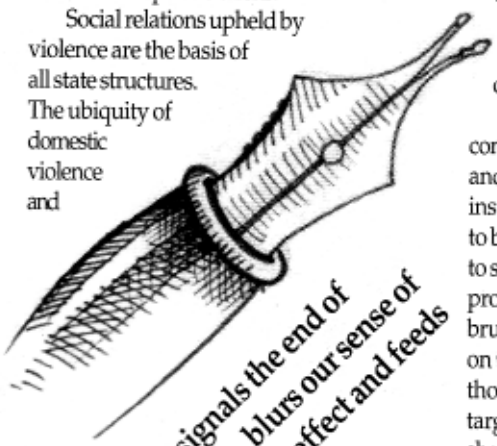
Gubbi Veeramra in the play 'Sadarame'

Upon hearing that I was to be the advisor for a documentary film on non-violence, one of my respected erstwhile teachers remarked that it was 'the richest irony'. He had good cause to say so. In my student days I was convinced that the only way any real social and political change could be brought about was by means of revolutionary violence. I became an activist in this cause in 1970, and after the first phase of 'extremism', as it was then called, came to an end, I set aside this question as of tangential importance, not deserving of philosophical or theoretical consideration. Years later, when I was severely physically assaulted in a struggle against corruption in the college where I worked, I became aware of the intense significance of this question. For this realisation at least, I am beholden to my assailants.

The most striking feature of the murder of Rajiv Gandhi was not the suicide of a young woman, but the fact that a man calmly watched the entire event in the knowledge that it was being recorded on camera. There are now young people all over the world for whom the sight of human flesh and blood is an ordinary experience. As a teacher, I was horrified to learn that many students had witnessed people being burnt alive in the Delhi carnage of 1984 and some had even participated in the violence. Should I have been surprised? Some members of the child-murder gangs of Colombia are not yet in their teens, and child-*mujahids* were sent into battle by Iran in its war with Iraq. For Palestinian refugee children, destruction wrought by Israeli jets or warring militia are still part of everyday life, while the school children of Israel live in a perpetual climate of tension to which their government contributes as much as embittered Palestinians. Generations of Black children in South Africa have known violence all their lives. Visual media has helped reduce to nil the distance that separates us from manifestations of human brutality. Violence has become part of everyday life.

Systemic violence is the lubricant of all oppressive social relations. Part of its baggage is the negation of reason, equality and respect for humanity. Violence directed at labourers, and women and children is the substratum of patriarchy and exploitation. In the months of April and May 1997, two cases of young women being murdered by their caste-panchayats have been reported from north India. Both were in their teens. They had committed the 'crime' of falling in love and making their own decisions about a life partner. The fact that both belonged to backward castes and that there was no hue and cry over the atrocities by the political representatives of the backward classes shows that those who portray themselves as politically progressive have scant commitment to individual liberty or the human rights of women. It would seem that instances of 'domestic' violence are accepted as normal, when the victims are women. The social conscience of the articulate middle classes is far more exercised over financial matters than the loss of human life or the humiliation of weak and helpless citizens.

Social relations upheld by violence are the basis of all state structures. The ubiquity of domestic violence and social degradation accustoms people to physical intimidation. This kind of 'training' psychologically prepares people for violent experiences later in life. All over the world, armed bodies of men have trained themselves to kill for the sake of power and the subordination of others. It might seem ironic, but 'progressive developments' such as the Industrial Revolution and the growth of democratic politics exacerbated this trend, with entire societies being mobilised for war. The First World War cost 20 million lives and the Second, 55 million. Today the advanced capitalist countries spend 500 billion dollars annually on the military of which a third is spent on arms purchases and development. There are about 100 million land mines scattered in 69 countries which kill or maim 500 persons every week, 26,000 every year, most of them civilians. (Manufacturing a mine costs a few dollars, deactivating one 200 to 1000 dollars). Vast resources are spent on war preparations: comparitive estimates tell us that even a 20 per cent reduction in military budgets would bring 189 million children into school, the cost of one Seawolf nuclear submarine (2.5 billion dollars) would pay for an immunisation programme for all the world's children, and the cost of one Stealth bomber, for family planning services for 120 million women in the developing world. Despite a decline in arms trading since the end of the Cold War, arms merchants and military industries still exercise a powerful influence over governments. Social priorities in today's world can only be described as deranged.



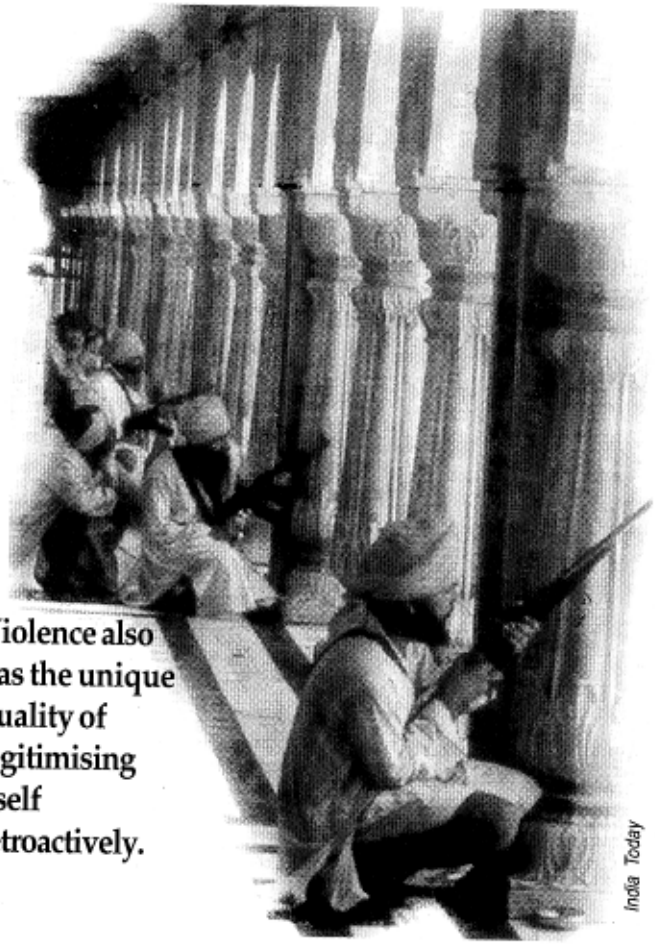
Violence signals the end of conversation, blurs our sense of time, cause and effect and feeds upon itself.

Violence signals the end of conversation, blurs our sense of time, cause and effect and feeds upon itself. As an instrument of liberation, it has a tendency to become illusory, as the oppressed begin to speak the language of oppression. It produces a spiral of justifications for brutality, enabling its perpetrators to take on the guise of victims. In the minds of those who killed Sikh citizens in 1984, their targets were not 'innocent', rather, they shared the blame for the murder of Indira Gandhi and the violence indulged in by Bhindranwale. For their part, the Punjab terrorists had convinced themselves that they were only responding to the victimisation of their community by the Indian state. Violence also has the unique quality of legitimising itself retroactively. Terror in Punjab in the late 1980s seemed to justify terror in the nation's capital in 1984. (Till this day the Lok Sabha has not seen fit to pass a resolution of condolence for the thousands of persons killed in those bloodstained seventy-two hours). Similarly the hatred directed at Indian Muslims by a certain political tendency has tended to produce a post-facto justification for the two-nation theory of Jinnah upon which the Partition was based. In turn, that hatred appeared to those possessed by it as a consequence of the 'separatism' of Muslims in general and retribution for the pain and trauma suffered by Hindu and Sikh

refugees in 1947. Who is to blame? This a question fraught with ambivalence. But for those who have succumbed to communal ideology, it is a very simple question indeed, and the easy answer is always: 'They'.

Let us consider the prevalence of the idea of victimhood. An examination of instances of mass animosity will reveal that the sense of being victimised is central to an explanation of violence. The Nazis invented the Final Solution (i.e., mass extermination) in order to deal with a so-called Jewish conspiracy which they claimed had victimised the German people. Of course, the question of social oppression is a highly charged political issue. Thus, although it is generally accepted that the so-called low castes were the victims of the brahmanical social order, upper-caste Indian society feels itself victimised by them for having obtained affirmative action in state policy. 'These SC-STs are the most privileged people in India', is a sentiment often heard in private conversations—it becomes public on occasions like the anti-Mandal agitation of 1990. Relations between Hindus and Muslims are even more complex, because of the deep-rooted conviction in Hindu society that the advent of Islam in India was accompanied by widespread manifestations of intolerance towards non-Muslims. Such perceptions are based partly on facts, but they also involve simplifications and tend to leave out memories and instances of their opposite. Howsoever we choose to look at it, the fact remains that this is a common perception. For their part, elite Muslims experienced the growth of a popular national movement as the gradual development, not of democracy but, of a Hindu majoritarian polity which would swamp them in due course. Each community felt victimised by the other and leaders marshalled arguments to prove their point. Here then, is a case of the circular logic that overtakes the dialogue of antagonistic communities.

Those of us concerned with social change must think seriously about the patriarchal and reactionary nature of violence. Why, for instance, did the militant patriot Bhagat Singh in his last days write that non-violence was a must for mass movements? Perhaps he understood instinctively that the politics of terror could only be practised (in the main) by organisations of young men, whereas democratic movements required the participation of millions of people, including women, children and the elderly, most of whom would not want to die for high ideals but live in the hope of a better future. However, non-violence is not merely a matter of tactics. Rather, it is connected to fundamental issues of the nature of power and the kind of liberation we may seek.



India Today

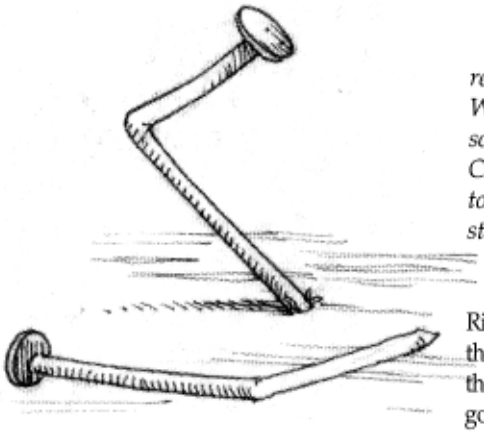
Violence also has the unique quality of legitimising itself retroactively.

With God on Our Side ...

Even more than the matter of physical harm, violence manifests the desire to humiliate the opponent and subjugate his or her dignity. This emotion has deadly and debilitating effects. Society will always pay a price for the humilation of any of its constituents—even if these effects take centuries to work themselves out. The relations between Armenians and Turks, African-Americans and White Americans, Black and White in South Africa, the Irish and the English, carry with them a legacy of bitterness rooted in a centuries-long history.

However, no society can be held together solely by means of force, if only because of the complete social disruption that would follow. Even the powerful require some peace in order to enjoy their power. Because of this, the products of intellect and intuition, such as reason, philosophy, religion and art, have had a tendency to be harnessed to the needs of the state. Moreover, acts of violence always seem to need ethical justification, as if in implicit acceptance of their status as wrong-doing. Hence, the persistent relation of violence to ethical issues and the development of structures of organised violence into ideological systems specialising in the alteration of moral sensibilities to produce versions of the 'just war' or *dharmayuddha*.

To take one example of the spiralling effects of violence from history, I will draw the reader's attention to events that took place nine centuries ago. I refer to the Crusades undertaken by medieval Christianity to 'liberate' Jerusalem from the suzerainty of the Seljuks, a Turkish dynasty which conquered Palestine in the middle of the eleventh century. Historical evidence suggests that the project was part of a Papal scheme to subjugate Byzantium



Society will always pay a price for the humilation of any of its constituents—even if these effects take centuries to work themselves out.

(Byzantine was the ancient name for Constantinople, which later became Istanbul and was the centre of the flourishing Eastern Orthodox Church). Pope Urban II launched the First Crusade (1096 – 99 AD). His slogan 'God Wills It', was a means of uniting western princes and overcoming any priestly aversion to violence. Armed with ethical authority, the crusaders convinced themselves of the need to exterminate the Turks. Their blood-lust was displayed in the five-week long seige and capture of Jerusalem, when, maddened by victory after years of travail they rushed into houses and mosques, killing men, women and children alike on 15 July 1099. The Jews were held to have assisted the Muslims and were burnt alive in their synagogue. Western sources put the number of Arabs killed at 10,000. After this, Arabs began referring to the westerners (Franks) as 'Christian dogs'. Here is what a historian has to say:

The massacre at Jerusalem profoundly impressed all the world … [and] emptied Jerusalem of its Moslem and Jewish inhabitants. Many even of the Christians were horrified by what had been done; and amongst the Moslems, who had been ready hitherto to accept the Franks … there was henceforward a clear determination that [they] must be driven out. It was this bloodthirsty proof of Christian fanaticism that recreated the fanaticism of Islam. When, later, wiser Latins in the East sought to find some basis on which Christian and Moslem could work together, the memory of the massacre stood always in their way.

During the Third Crusade (1191), King Richard the Lion-Hearted ordered thousands of prisoners slaughtered and their corpses burnt to search for hidden gold. 'Horrified at this atrocity, the Islamic world became ineradicably suspicious of the West'. The contemporary Arab poet Mosaffer Allah Werdis composed these pain-stricken lines:

We have mingled our blood and our tears
None remains who has strength enough to beat off these oppressors
The sight of our weapons only brings sorrow to us
who must weep while the swords of war spark off the all-consuming flames...
Oh that so much blood had to flow, that so many women were left with nothing but their bare hands to protect their modesty !
Amid the fearful clashing swords and lances, the faces of the children grow white with horror.

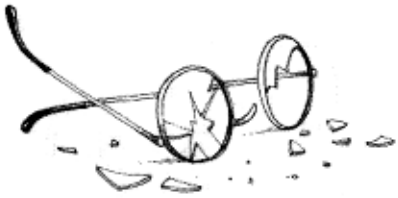
In contrast to the sword-blessing popes of medieval Catholicism, the Eastern Church believed that faith ought only to be propagated by spiritual means. Although Turkish pressure had pushed Byzantine Christianity towards compromise with the Latins, the behaviour of the crusading armies en route to Palestine created a gulf between the two traditions. The turning point was marked by the vandalism let loose in Constantinople in 1204 AD during the Fourth Crusade by men whose fathers had promised to defend it from the Turks. From this time onwards, Byzantine Christians referred to the crusaders as 'Frankish barbarians'. Incidentally, the Persian word *firingi*, meaning 'French, Italian or European', originated in the colloquial Arabic word *franj*, which carried a connotation of barbarism from the time of the Crusades. Given these experiences this is not surprising. Thus, our own Hindustani term *firangi* was coloured from the start by a hateful usage steeped in the violence of the massacres of Jerusalem.

I leave it to the reader to consider whether mythic memories of these events might have any bearing on contemporary relations between Palestinians and Israelis, Arabs and the West, and Muslims and Christians in a part of the world that still transmits its violent tension all over the Middle East and beyond.

However, there also existed a more down-to-earth attitude among the Christian public, who began to support pacifist movements in the aftermath of the Crusades. This attitude was expressed in the writings of, for example, the French poet Rutebeuf, who had some very sensible things to say about holy war and holy places:

Am I to leave my wife and children, all my goods and inheritance, to go and conquer a foreign land which will give me nothing in return?
I can worship God just as much in Paris as in Jerusalem. One doesn't have to cross the sea to get to Paradise. Those rich lords and prelates who have grabbed … all the treasures on earth may well need to go on Crusade. But I live in peace with my neighbours … I am not bored with them yet and so I have no desire to go looking for a war… as long as [the Sultan] leaves me alone,
I shall not bother my head about him. All you people ... who go on pilgrimage to the Promised Land, ought to become very holy there: so how does it happen that the ones who come back are mostly bandits? … God is everywhere: to you He may only be in Jerusalem, but to me He is here in France as well.

Why do lines penned by a Frenchman seven centuries ago strike a chord in contemporary India? Is it because just four and a half years ago lakhs of Indians were sufficiently motivated by revengeful fervour to destroy a mosque? And that this act was seen by them as justifiable retaliation for acts of destruction which had taken place in mid-sixteenth century? Is it because a town called Ayodhya has been emptied of its Muslim inhabitants? A bystander in the long corridors of time might well wonder about how the thirst for revenge is never quenched, and how generations of victims stagger through the



centuries victimising one another.

Sunil Janah

Gandhi's Truth

It is impossible to address the theme of non-violence without taking into account the attitude of its greatest practitioner. As a young man, I treated Gandhi's pacifism with contempt—young men in particular are prone to associating violence with masculinity and non-violence with weakness. The thought that ahimsa could actually represent courage was alien to me. Our movement treated the Gandhian tradition as an obstacle to revolution and his leadership of the national movement as a gigantic failure. Apart from the personal experience of violence that I mentioned at the start of this essay, it was the failure of the revolutionary movement and the growth of communal hatred that gradually brought home to me the continuing relevance of Gandhi's life and the manner in which he left it. I remember being upset by an essay on Gandhi by a leftist Hindi literateur who ended his diatribe with fulsome praise for Nathuram Godse, Gandhi's assassin. This awakened me to the disconcerting potential similarities which attend doctrines of violent political change. The main currents of leftism in India have still not come to terms with Gandhi (a lacuna which is parallel to their failure to theorise the question of violence), but the rapid growth of communalism in the past fifteen years has alerted them to his commitment to and sacrifices for the cause of communal harmony. This realisation culminated in a demonstration in Delhi on Gandhi's death anniversary in January 1993.

Gandhi's ideas are sometimes misconstrued because of his refusal to countenance the separation of religion from politics. It is easier to understand this matter if we simply substitute the word 'ethics' for 'religion' and 'power' for 'politics'. Does any of us seriously believe that the exercise of power ought to be devoid of moral considerations? Gandhi saw himself as a *karmayogi*, and regarded selfless worldly action directed towards the attainment of self-knowledge and collective salvation as his spiritual duty. He saw political activity as the supreme sphere of social action, but he insisted on imbuing this action with ethical imperatives such as ahimsa and the abolition of untouchability. In search, not of personal power but sovereignty for the Indian people, he exercised tremendous moral influence emanating from his renunciation of selfish goals—the hallmark of the traditional Hindu *tyagi*. Truth for him was the catch-all for the supreme goals of spirituality, including moksha and self-knowledge, as well as values such as justice and integrity. Non-violence was implicit in his Truth: 'Truth is its own proof, and non-violence is its supreme fruit'. His motives were at once spiritual and political—he did away with the separateness of their definitions, as he overcame the distinction between means and ends. Religion was not an instrument to be used tactically for the pursuit of political power, rather, political activity had to be virtuous and transparent in order to attain sound goals.

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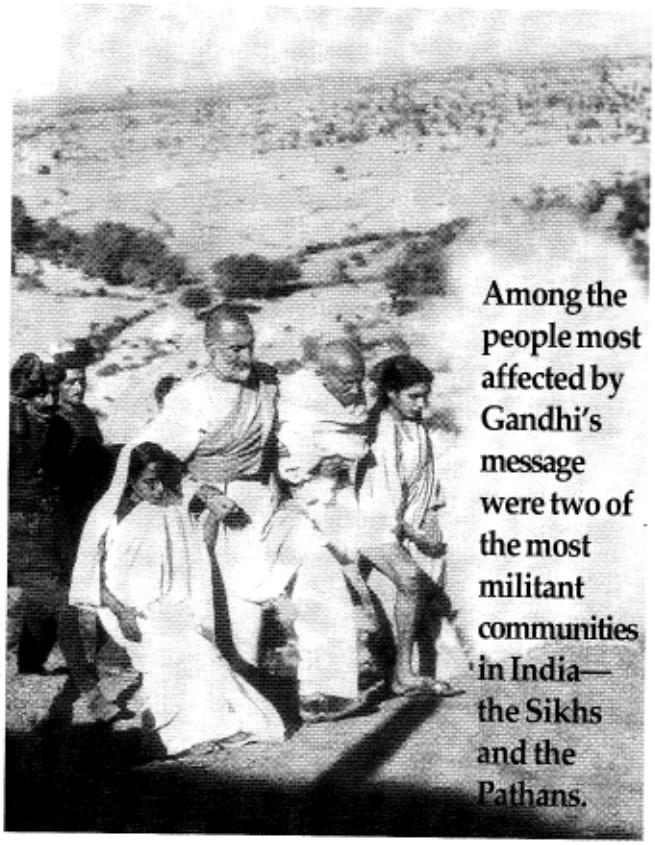
For all his apparent conservatism it is clear that Gandhi subjected both tradition and contemporary spiritual authority to the test of his own conscience. Even if it were true that Tulsidas used to beat his wife, he remarks, 'the *Ramayana* was not composed in order to justify men beating their wives'. And despite the scenes of carnage described in the Bhagvad Gita, Gandhi insists that Vyasa wrote his epic 'to depict the futility of war', that the struggle described in it was a metaphor for the inner struggle between good and evil faced by all human beings. If the purest form of action was devoid of desire for reward, then violence and untruthfulness were taboo, for selfishness was implied in them. Language and meaning changed and expanded over the centuries, argued Gandhi, and 'it is the very beauty of a good poem that it is greater than its author'. Despite the war metaphors of the Gita, he insisted that 'after forty years of unremitting endeavour to enforce the teaching of the Gita in my own life, I have in all humility felt that perfect renunciation is impossible without perfect observance of ahimsa in every shape and form'. Gandhi's conscience impelled him

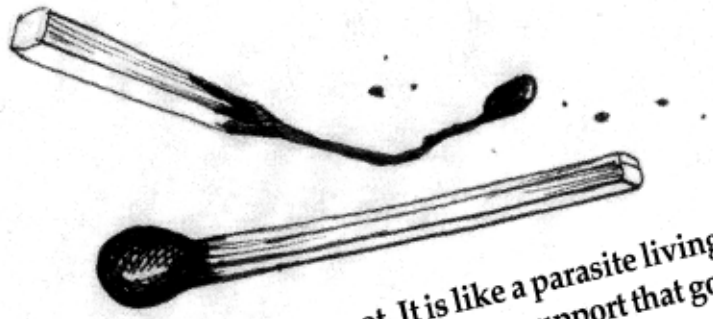
towards human equality and the peaceful resolution of political and social conflict. He rejected the violence inherent in caste-oppression and the potential justification for violence contained in various religious texts and traditions. It is a mark of his theological creativity that he managed to speak in a conservative voice whilst advocating a radical break from existent traditional practices.

It is even more remarkable that among the people most affected by Gandhi's message were two of the most militant communities in India—the Sikhs and the Pathans. Few might remember today that the Akali party originated in a successful non-violent movement for the liberation of *guruduwaras* from corrupt pro-British *mahants*. The Guru-ka-Bagh agitation in 1922 involved the peaceful violation of a ban on woodcutting for religious purposes by Akali *jathas*, whose members (many of whom were ex-soldiers who had fought for the British Empire in the First World War) were mercilessly beaten with metal-capped lathis by English police officers and their Indian underlings. Some 1500 were injured and 5000 imprisoned in a campaign which shook the country. Gandhi's associate, C. F. Andrews witnessed this 'ultimate moral contest'. The sight of the brutalities, he reported, was 'incredible to an Englishman'. 'Each blow [was] turned into a triumph by the spirit with which it was endured'. Similarly the activity of the red-shirted Khudai Khidmadgar (Servants of God) movement in the North West Frontier Province manifested one of the most staunchly Gandhian campaigns for national independence and social upliftment in pre-1947 India. Their leader, Abdul Ghaffar Khan came to be known as the Frontier Gandhi, and preached a version of Islam which emphasised peace, forbearance and self-restraint. The Khidmadgars were in the forefront of the Civil Disobedience campaign in 1931, when they seized control of Peshawar and even ran a parallel administration for a few days after a regiment of the Garhwal Rifles (all Hindus) refused to open fire on Pathan *satyagrahis*. A Turkish scholar who visited the Frontier in the 1930s suggested that the Pathans had developed a new interpretation of force. In her words, 'non-violence is the only form of force which can have a lasting effect on the life of society .... And this, coming from strong and fearless men, is worthy of study'.

Gandhi's understanding of violence sprang from his spiritual convictions. The fact that in the *Mahabharata* the wrong-doers had good men like Bhishma and Drona, on their side was for him a sign that, 'evil cannot by itself flourish in this world. It can do so only if it is allied with some good'. He wrote this in 1926 and remained consistent in his belief. In 1940, he said, '*Goondas* do not drop from the sky, nor do they spring from the earth like evil spirits. They are the product of social disorganisation, and society is therefore responsible for their existence ... they should be looked upon as a symbol of corruption in our body-politic'. Confronted by riots in 1946 he said, 'I deprecate the habit of procuring a moral alibi for ourselves by blaming it all on the *goondas*. We always put the blame on *goondas*. But it is we who are responsible for their creation as well as encouragement'. And at the height of the violence of 1947 he said, 'it is time for peace-loving citizens to assert themselves and isolate goondaism. Non-violent non-cooperation is the universal remedy. Good is self-existent, evil is not. It is like a parasite living in, and around good. It will die of itself when the support that good gives it is withdrawn'. These insights were the products of his interventions in places which had witnessed some of the worst instances of communal violence in pre-independence India—the villages of Noakhali and the city of Calcutta. For contemporary observers, it was nothing short of a miracle that Hindus and Muslims in their thousands attended Gandhi's prayer meetings and even celebrated Eid together in August 1947. Viceroy Mountbatten sent him this telegram: 'My dear Gandhiji, In the Punjab we have 55 thousand soldiers and large-scale rioting on our hands. In Bengal our forces consist of one man, and there is no rioting .... As a serving officer may I be allowed to pay my tribute to the One Man Boundary Force ...'. The Muslim League in the Constituent Assembly in Delhi passed a resolution expressing its 'deep sense of appreciation of the services rendered by Mr. Gandhi to the cause of restoration of peace and goodwill between the communities in Calcutta'. Less than a month later, Gandhi went on fast against a renewed outbreak of violence and the city witnessed the unprecedented scene of the European-commanded police force observing a 24-hour fast in sympathy with Gandhi and blood-crazed *goondas* surrendering their weapons to him. The staunchly anti-Congress English editor of *The Statesman* made a point of announcing that henceforth 'Mr. Gandhi' would be referred to in his columns as Mahatma. If we were to use Gandhi's logic to describe the situation he confronted in 1947, we could say that the struggle between violence and ahimsa



Among the people most affected by Gandhi's message were two of the most militant communities in India—the Sikhs and the Pathans.



'Good is self-existent, evil is not. It is like a parasite living in, and around good. It will die of itself when the support that good gives it is withdrawn.'—Gandhi

was going on in every soul, and was not merely demarcated by the social distance between *goondas* and polite society.

Gandhi was not the hopeless idealist that many consider him to be. He recognised that complete non-violence implied total cessation of all activity, and that this was incompatible with the need for it to be practised by the common people. He also made a distinction between the violence of the oppressors and that of the oppressed—defensive violence, in his view, was morally superior to the offensive variety. Violence, in Gandhi's definition, lay in causing 'suffering to others out of selfishness, or just for the sake of doing so'. He distinguished between self-interest and selfishness—the former meant securing those conditions necessary for leading a human and dignified life, the latter, putting oneself above others and pursuing one's interests at their expense. Violent ideas were dangerous, since they created conditions for their realisation. Humiliating others was also a form of violence. Gandhi recognised that the state was an institutionalised and concentrated form of violence, and was convinced that this was due in great part to the need for maintaining an unjust and exploitative social system. In extreme situations he argued, violence was preferable to cowardice—he was against using ahimsa as a means of rationalising passivity in the face of grave injustice and wrongdoing. He favoured physical resistance by victims of rape if there was no possibility of resisting non-violently.

Ultimately however, as the scholar Bhikhu Parekh puts it, Gandhi was convinced that 'the reign of violence could not be overthrown by adding to it'. Great danger lay in deriving commonplace justifications for violence, such as the violation of nature in the name of human self-interest, the need to maintain the coercive apparatus of the state, revolutionary violence practised in the name of resistance to oppression. He was, in Parekh's words, 'deeply worried about the way in which the limited legitimacy of violence in human life was so easily turned into its general justification', making it the rule rather than the exception. Once this happened, 'men kept taking advantage of the exceptions and made no effort to find alternatives'. This for him was the main reason for stressing the need for social and political activists to train themselves in the ideal of ahimsa, which in his definition was not merely the absence of violence but included the positive value of *karuna*, or compassion. By elevating ahimsa to the level of a moral ideal, he hoped to minimise the violence which was inevitable in the process of social and political transformation. Even if it could never be fully realised, ahimsa functioned as a kind of utopia, without which human society would have no standards of perfection towards which to strive and against which we might judge our actions.

Mandela's *Long Walk to Freedom*

In the contemporary world, there is no statesman with as high a stature as Nelson Mandela, and no real-life story so dramatic as his role in the dismantling of apartheid. This is manifest in the outpouring of genuine affection which he evokes among people of all races and communities. There is no doubt that without him the struggle against the racist system and the dangerous circumstances arising out of its eventual collapse would have been accompanied with far greater disruption and violence than actually took place. In this sense, Mandela has contributed to a (relatively) non-violent resolution of a potentially explosive situation. So his views on this matter are of no small significance. In his acclaimed memoir, *Long Walk to Freedom*, Mandela repeatedly says that for him, non-violence was an issue subject to pragmatic rather than ethical principles. 'For me, non-violence was not a moral principle but a strategy; there is no moral goodness in using an ineffective weapon'. His positions arose out of his compulsions, but at the level of ideas, they may be characterised as utilitarian and usefulness as a standard of goodness is no standard at all. Mandela also made a contrast between the white supremacist state which permitted no political freedom whatsoever to the African population, and the British raj, which he saw as a system which did not confront peaceful protest with violence. Here he is mistaken, because from Jallianwala Bagh to the Civil Disobedience campaigns of the early 1930s, instances abound of the British rulers of India doing precisely that. Nevertheless it could be argued that aspects of the apartheid regime such as segregation and the attempted ghettoisation of the entire Black population were certainly worse than the Indian polity under British imperialism.

However, this is not the place for a comparative discussion about the British Empire and South Africa under apartheid. What I am concerned with is Mandela's manner of dealing with the means used to fight against an unjust system. Despite his stated belief in a tactical rather than ethical approach to this question, Mandela's passionate belief in the need to avoid a racial civil war in South Africa and his focus as commander of the MK (the military wing of the African National Congress), on the sabotage of installations rather than on terror directed at human beings indicate his deep-rooted ambivalence with regard to the use of violence. He recounts an incident in his memoir about an occasion when he shot a sparrow with an air-rifle at a hideout in the countryside. The five-year old son of the house-owner looked at

the dead bird with tears in his eyes and asked why he had killed the bird, adding, 'its mother will be sad'. Mandela remembers his sensations at hearing this—'My mood immediately shifted from one of pride to shame; I felt that this small boy had far more humanity than I did. It was an odd sensation for a man who was the leader of a nascent guerilla army'. Only a politician with deeply pacific instincts (and mind you, he was quite clear that he was not a pacifist) would derive a philosophical lesson from the shooting of a sparrow.

Mandela's memoir is full of such ambivalences but they enhance rather than diminish his stature. Why is this so? It is because like Gandhi, his life activity speaks more than his words and theories. He rose to become Chief Executive of the state he fought all his life, but would it not be grossly unjust to him to say that he devoted himself to the pursuit of power? His complete lack of rancour towards those who ran a vicious police state, kept him in prison for nearly three decades and disallowed him even from attending the funeral of his mother, show him up to be a man whose dignity would always remain unimpaired. To my mind, it is this quality that enabled him to transcend the impulse to retribution, which is one of the roots of violence. He did not need to humiliate his opponents in order to achieve his ends. This is why, after all is said and done, the struggle against apartheid did not succeed on account of revolutionary violence and terrorism but the political and ethical collapse of its institutions in the face of universal antipathy and opposition.

Today, the struggle to overcome the bitter legacy of racism is being carried out in the same spirit. Mandela's government has instituted the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, an unique body with statutory authority to grant amnesty to those who confess to be the perpetrators of gross human rights violations. Great problems have and will inevitably affect its work—not least of which is the sense of alienation which attends any interposition of the administration between perpetrators and victims of violence. Nevertheless, the commissions's work is an unprecedented effort to heal wounds on the basis of human reconciliation. I am reminded of a statement which occurs in a controversial Russian film critical of Stalinism (entitled

Nelson Mandela Long Walk to Freedom

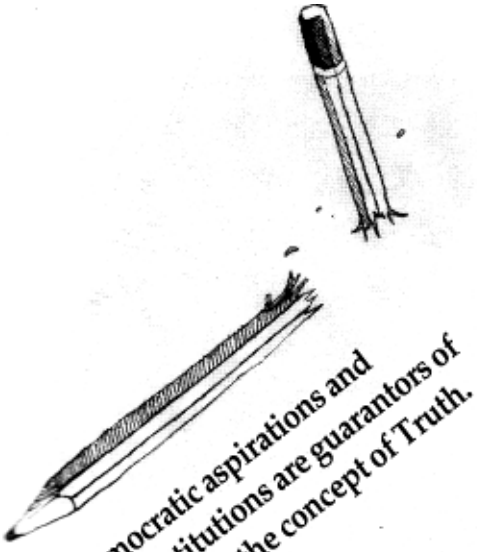
The struggle against apartheid did not succeed on account of revolutionary violence and terrorism but the political and ethical collapse of its institutions in the face of universal antipathy and opposition.

Repentance) made in the Gorbachev era in which the protagonist makes a distinction between a mistake, a crime and a sin. Mistakes may be rectified, he says, and crimes punished, but there is only one antidote for sin, and that is repentance. That this is a feasible and (compared to revenge and retribution) potentially satisfactory procedure for coping with ethnic bitterness is shown by an incident which took place in Gujarat in January 1994. A news report described tens of thousands of citizens in Sidhpur, Mehsana (affected by riots in the aftermath of the Babri Masjid demolition), taking a public pledge of peace, with killers acknowledging their guilt and the families of the victims declaring their forgiveness. The remarkable maturity displayed by the citizens of Sidhpur is an object-lesson for people all over the world caught in a similar predicament. Justice and social order are a matter of balance between means applied and ends obtained, the need for punishment and the need for reform, the conscience of the individual and the interests of society.

These sometimes conflictual elements can only be reconciled on the plane of a social ethic, although the kind of ethic invoked and the nature of the reconciliation effected will differ in each polity. And it is the ethical terrain upon which Palestinians and the nationalist Irish (to take only two prominent examples of populations currently involved in violent conflict), may obtain their desired ends, if only they have the courage to reconcile ends and means on the pattern of ahimsa.

As You Sow ...

What is the truth of the matter? In an age whose common sense has it that everything is exchangeable with money, where images are valued more than the things they represent, religious and cultural values appropriated and used as instruments for the pursuit of power, the concept of truth seems to have become redundant. For example, cigarette advertisements portray smokers having a good time, in the pink of health, whereas the truth of the matter is that smoking tobacco causes cancer and heart disease. To take another example, in May 1992, the national television telecast an adulatory portrayal of V. D. Savarkar, the militant Hindu nationalist, without mentioning that he was an accused and main conspirator in the murder of Mahatma Gandhi. We may also note the linguistic transformation of Babri Masjid from a mosque into a 'disputed structure'. At the best of times, advertisements (and propaganda) convey a mixture of fact and fiction, communication and misinformation. Where is the concern for truth in all this? What matters is whether the image is credible or incredible, not whether it is true. Nonetheless, society cannot dispense with the concept of truth. Physical laws are not subject to political manipulation, even if they may be put to nefarious uses, and in the social realm, brute facts such as oppression and exploitation have a habit of surfacing after decades. Popular democratic aspirations and transparent



Popular democratic aspirations and transparent institutions are guarantors of the social value of the concept of Truth.

institutions are other guarantors of the social value of the concept of Truth.

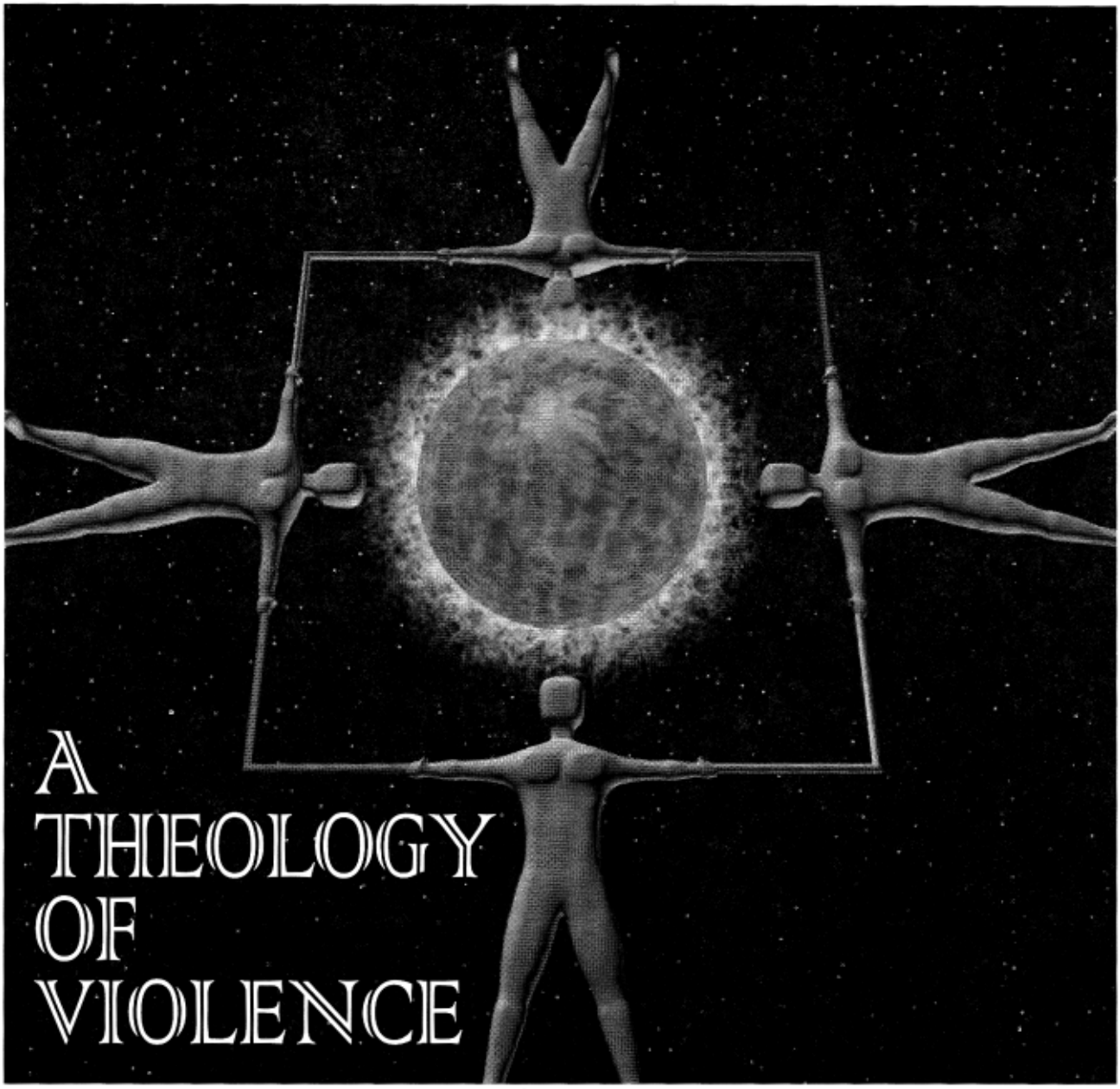
Truth is a term which admits of many meanings. At the very least, it can mean Reality as well as Ideality. In any case, it implies a search, an ideal and a standard. It may never be attained as a whole, but can still be worth striving for. However for a certain cast of mind, truth does not imply a search, but a revelation. If one 'revealed truth' does not set itself against others like itself, no conflict arises. But if in real life, its followers cannot bear to coexist with followers of other beliefs, they are already in the process of arming themselves, converting their belief into the absolute Truth. And it is in the very nature of absolutism that it reacts violently to difference. Enlarging on Gandhi's arguments against violence, Parekh appearing before the Disorders Inquiry Committee at Ahmedabad in the wake of the agitations of 1919, Gandhi was asked by Lord Hunter to consider the position of the Governors, who were obliged to uphold the law and punish those whose stated object was to violate it. Gandhi replied that non-violent *satyagrahis* protesting unjust laws were 'the best constitutionalists'. Hunter told him that opinions might differ as to the justice or injustice of laws, to which Gandhi replied that this was the reason he insisted on non-violence—a *satyagrahi*, he said, gives the right of independent judgement to his opponent. Sir Chimanlal Setalvad, another member of the committee, sought to trap Gandhi on his stated objective of the pursuit of truth: 'However honestly a man may strive in his search for truth, his notions of truth may be different from the notions of others. Who then is to determine the truth?' Once more, Gandhi made his point by insisting that it was precisely because there were differing versions of the truth that 'the non-violence part was a necessary corollary' to his struggle.

Here, in my opinion, is a profound yet simple contribution to one of the most turbulent philosophical debates of our age—fascinated as it is by plural identities, the many-sidedness of meaning and the rejection of universals. Gandhi was not a speculative philosopher, but his position offers a way out of the conundrum created by contemporary (post-modern) relativism, viz., the fate of standards of judgment once we accept the many-sidedness of meaning. Gandhi accepts this multiplicity, but insists that there is an ethical standard by which all relative 'truths' may be judged—their contribution to the attainment of ahimsa. In this sense he was a profound egalitarian humanist—he refused to use cultural, religious and political differences among people to stereotype them as less than human, as worthy of discrimination, injustice and violence. This did not mean that he suspended his rational intellect or refrained from making his own assessment of religious practices, cultures and systems of thought. He kept his own counsel, made his own judgements, and remained a practising Hindu till the moment of his death. But it is difficult to fault him for demeaning or ridiculing the beliefs of others. All he asked was that a way be found for resolving disputes, pursuing arguments, overcoming (or indeed, living with) differences in a manner consistent with human dignity. When we stop to consider the scale of destruction that society has unleashed upon itself and still prepares for, the need for a non-violent culture stares us in the face.

According to one estimate, our century has seen some 250 wars and nearly 110 million deaths related to war and ethnic conflict. Over the decades, an increasing proportion of these losses have taken place among civilians. The explosive energy yield of the current (reduced) global nuclear weapons stockpile is 8000 megatons (the equivalent of 8000 million tons of TNT). This is 727 times the total yield of all the explosives used in World War II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War put together. Between 1960 – 94, the developing countries spent 775 billion dollars on arms purchases, which made up 69 per cent of the total world arms trade. In 1995 there were 22.4 million men and women in uniform—65 per cent of whom belonged to the developing world, whose populations are paying the price for the distorted social perspectives of their rulers. By any sane standard, it would appear that the human race is hypnotised by the death wish.

Ultimately ahimsa is another name for restraint. Gandhi's devotion to it has had a significant effect on our society, even though it remains true that democracy in India still has a long way to go. It is fashionable these days to bewail the fate of the Indian republic and to ascribe all its ills to its founders. It is worth considering that factors such as the pressure of Great Power interests, the consequences of rampaging global capitalism and the selfishness of our ruling elite may well be the factors more responsible for our problems. We should remember that India has not yet succumbed to the authoritarian vision of communal politics, nor to the jackboots of military rule. One reason for this lies in the impact of a mass democratic movement for national liberation which despite all its weaknesses, did achieve sovereignty on the basis of a non-violent political programme. Of the several thousand daily visitors to Gandhi Smriti in Delhi (the place of his assassination), a large number are village folk who treat the memory of the Mahatma with great reverence. The elite may have reduced him to an icon and the urban middle-class might treat him with ignorance and disdain, but it would seem that humbler Indians have not yet forgotten the man. He touched a chord which I believe has acquired a permanent place in the conversation of humanity. Restraint and compassion are qualities which will always be necessary for human society to survive. If we aspire to a more humane, less brutal and more civilised state of existence, the spirit and optimism required to attain it will in no small part have been generated by the life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and his message of ahimsa.

Illustrations: **Rustam Vania**



A THEOLOGY OF VIOLENCE

G. GISPERT SAUCH, S. J.

Paul Ricoeur is reported to have said that 'violence, usually in a crude form, is the mainspring of history' (*Esprit*, Feb. 1949, as reported by P. Regamey, O.P., *Non-Violence and the Christian Conscience*, London, DLT, 1966). And Jesus himself, however much Gandhi would see him as the perfect *satyagrahi*, in a paradoxical declaration, says that the Kingdom of God (i.e., the new society as he saw it in the divine plan) suffers violence and only people of violence take it by force (Mt 11:12; see Lk 16:16).

Do these affirmations challenge our accepted notions about non-violence? Are they a denial of the ancient wisdom that proclaimed *ahimsa paramo dharmah*? What is really the meaning of violence, what is *ahimsa*?

In the broadest possible sense, every change may be seen as an act of violence. Every sprouting of a plant out of its seed, every impregnation of a womb, every birth of a living being could be presented as a violent event. Change comes from the active principle constitutive of nature but it comes as a disturbance of an established calm. Its root is *rajas*, but *rajas* is as authentic and important as *sattva* or *tamas*. Ancient scholastics saw life as consisting of movement (*vita in motu*) and action as a sequel of being (*agere sequitur esse*). In this very broad sense, violence needs to be welcome. The alternative would be *pralaya*, a liminal existence in a sea of indetermination and immobility, and the highest form of existence would be that of a stone. Within this very broad perspective, violence is the principle of growth and history.

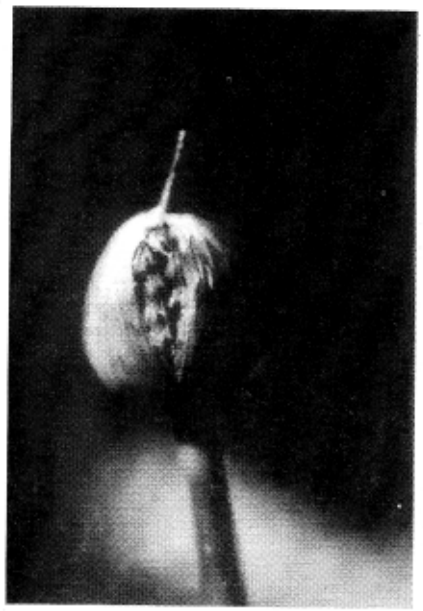
If we remain within this broad and metaphysical sense, we can find 'violence' at the very heart of being, even of transcendental being. For Aristotle, the Supreme Being is the *actus purus*, 'the pure act'. Indian metaphysics will associate the concept of *sat* or being with the dynamism of *cit* or consciousness and the overflow of *ananda* or bliss. The Christian tradition has articulated its perception of the Divine Reality in terms of the

'circumincession' or interplay of the divine principles which it calls 'Persons'—the ballet of the Divine Persons, someone has called it. In this broad sense, violence belongs to being and cannot be ethically wrong.

But we need to come down from this excessively broad metaphysical understanding to the concrete realm of history where violence is not co-terminous with change or life. Violence, as experienced among us, is a painful activity that goes against the will and well-being of a free person. Two new aspects enter now into our understanding of violence: pain or suffering, and the clash of wills resulting in the diminution of the well-being of an individual. Suffering and clash of wills are not identical. Birthing involves suffering, but it is not 'violence' in the accepted sense of the word as there is no real clash of wills that would diminish the well-being of a person. Rather, failure to deliver at the end of a pregnancy would be the real violence. Suffering is also involved in a surgical intervention which would not be violence because it is willingly accepted in the measure in which it is needed for the well-being of a person.

Besides suffering, violence involves a clash of wills between two or more individuals or groups. The violent act may or may not be legitimate, in one or other part of the conflict, or in all. We enter here the realm of ethics to which we shall presently give closer attention.

It seems, therefore, that an understanding of violence requires a broader semantic field. Traditions in East and West have seen this. When the Indian sages affirmed *ahimsa paramo dharmah* they placed violence firmly within the basic physical and moral structures of the universe, such as are enclosed within the meaning of dharma, the world of right order or righteousness. Animals kill one another by the 'law of the jungle'—and though sometimes we do metaphorically extend the meaning of violence to their world, in a strict sense they are not violent. They do not violate any law. They act according to their dharma. Violence belongs only to the realm of free and responsible activity, not to the world of instinct. Nobody blames a tiger or imprisons a cobra in punishment for their deeds, for they act according to their own dharma. Their 'violence', if we may call it



In the broadest possible sense, every change may be seen as an act of violence. Every sprouting of a plant out of its seed, every impregnation of a womb, every birth of a living being could be presented as a violent event.

so, can only be controlled, neutralised or suppressed. It cannot be blamed.

I think that this element of dharma is involved in the very etymology of the word ahimsa. Ahimsa negates *himsa*, which is not properly translated by the word 'violence'. *Himsa* is a noun derived from the desiderative form (*san*) of the verb *han* i.e., 'to strike' or 'to hit'. The desiderative form involves not merely the action, but the desire or the will to strike or hit (in our case), just as *jijnasa* means the desire to know or *pipasa* the desire to drink. Although by grammatical irregularity *himsa* has lost its re-duplication, it has not lost its signification involving the desire or will. Ahimsa, therefore, should be translated as 'the absence of the desire to strike or kill'. The violence absolutely renounced by this vow is rooted in the heart, in one's desires. An external, reluctant violence as in the case of legitimate self-defence would be compatible with the attitude of ahimsa.

While the Indian tradition has found the home of non-violence within the overarching understanding of dharma, the Bible speaks largely in terms of justice. Justice is the right order as seen from the perspective of God. But it is a right order that must be achieved within the world of injustice. Justice does not take place by simple non-interference. It must be established. The connection between ahimsa and justice leads us to the heart of the Old Testament writings and to the memory of those historical events of a people who knew themselves to have experienced a great transformation in their collective life. Not unlike the present Blacks of America, they kept alive the memory of a time when a part, at least, of their ancestors had been slaves, forming the labour force of the twelfth century BC splendid and sophisticated Egyptian civilisation in the land of the great pyramids. Within the splendour of an ancient dynasty, a group of slaves lived a miserable existence and groaned under ever harsher laws imposed by slave masters, middlemen who 'made their lives bitter with hard service' (Exodus 1:14).

Out of the misery there emerges a leader who has a new experience of God, the unfathomable Mystery whom their ancestors had known and remembered not as a God of the Mountains, the El-Shadai, or a *kutastha*, impartial God, but a God committed to human affairs, a God who is compassionate and close to the people: 'I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their task masters; I know their sufferings and have come down to deliver them out of the land of the Egyptians, and to bring them out of that land to a good and broad land' (Exodus, 3:7–8). This 'coming down,' this particular *avatar* of God, does not consist in God taking a human or any other form, but by enabling a leader and the people to struggle for their own liberation in the face of a powerful civilisation and their army of oppressors. It is within this call to liberation and within the struggle it demands that the ahimsa of the Bible must be placed. In the biblical account, this liberation started in a totally peaceful manner on the part of the people, in ways that often remind us of the

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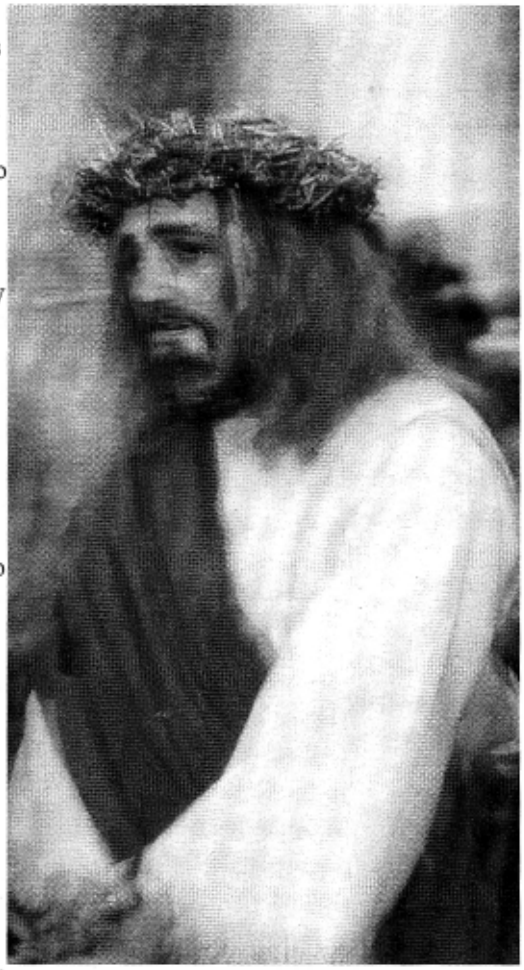
Gandhian freedom struggle. It could not be otherwise. The slaves could wield no arms. They were facing an oppressor with what can only be called a *satyagraha*, a peaceful pressure. They want to go out. They want to go to the desert to worship 'their God', which means that they want to live according to their national identity and their religious convictions. In Egypt they are not only slaves, they are strangers, aliens. They are Semites in a Hamitic world. Natural calamities and a totally non-violent pressure would win the day.

Justice in this context is an expression of the 'Reign of God' so central to the preaching of Jesus. This Reign (or 'the Kingdom of God' to use the traditional translation) must find expression both in personal attitudes and in social structures that protect the freedom, well-being and relationships of all people. The 'Reign of God' put the moral and ethical concept of justice within a theistic world view. Much of the *New Testament* will articulate this social vision in terms of 'love'. The dharma of society is the law of love.



Love, however, is a notoriously ambiguous word. Of course, the *New Testament* does not support the popular identification of love with sex. But neither is love, at the other end, mere compassion. Compassion, pity, is directed to the 'other' in so far as he or she (or it?) suffers. Pity is a noble sentiment, but not the highest spiritual ideal. Love is the supreme law. Love is addressed to the other in so far as he or she exists, because she or he is a person, an 'absolute value' worthy of devotion and eternal esteem. This is quite independent of whether the beloved is in pain or in joy. Of course, if the beloved is in sorrow, love will assume the colouring of pity or compassion, but this is not its deepest essence. The essence of love is the total self-gift of oneself to the other who is however united with oneself, a brother, a sister: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself'. Even in perfect moksha, when pity will no longer be possible because there will be no suffering, there will be the experience of love between human beings and between them and God—and whatever other personal beings there may exist—a compenetration in knowledge and mutual acceptance of all in the atmosphere of the knowledge and love of God. This is why true love can only exist between persons. We may pity animals, we may have affection for them. But they are not proper objects of love, and it would therefore be unethical to love them in such a way as to endanger human beings. Jesus places the love of God and of neighbour on a similar footing:

> *But when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they came together. And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question, to test him. 'Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?'*
> *And he said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets (Mt 21:34-40).*

To sum up—non-violence is not a rejection of change, nor a submission to stability or to an established disorder. Non-violence is understandable within the broader framework of meaning: as dharma, justice, God's Kingdom and love, which must be established and protected in a world of violence. This is surely how Gandhi understood it. He often identified ahimsa with love. But in the political philosophy and praxis he developed, ahimsa was closely associated with satyagraha, the 'earnest holding on to Truth' or the Right Order, the struggle for justice, and for freedom, equality and fraternity, all of which are expressions of love.

There are many problems related to the limits of non-violence and the use of violence, partly related to cultural pre-understandings. We shall touch on three of them—the legitimacy of a violent revolution in cases of unbearable social or political oppression, the traditional thinking about a 'just war' and the question of vegetarianism.

The Latin American Charter of Non-Violence, published by the Nobel Peace Laureate Adolfo Perez Esquivel (cf. *Christ in a Poncho*, New York, Orbis 1982, pp. 124-8), starts with a realistic analysis of the existing violence in the world. It makes it a point to speak of non-violence in a way that would not seem to legitimise or strengthen the existence of unjust social conditions, especially the great inequality between rich and poor, as evident in Latin America as it is in India and the rest of Asia. The same is also applicable to the inequalities between sexes:

> *There are several ways in which the people react to the reality of violence. Some prefer simply to ignore it; they refuse to look at it. This is an area of reality they prefer to cut themselves off from, by taking refuge in the artificial, narrow and closed world of their social class and unreal world around them. Others are willing to admit the fact of violence but take a*

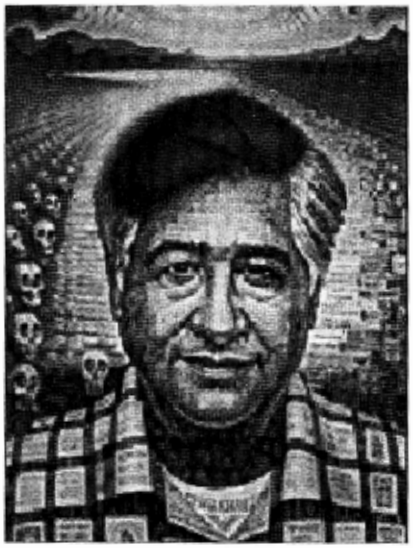
fatalistic view of it, as if it were an inevitable concomitant of the human condition or even a 'necessary evil'. For this reason, violence is seen as a choice falling within the legitimate purview of discretionary human options.

In its victims, violence generates passivity, resignation, and fear. When we have arrived at a society of numb masses—faceless and mute, stripped of all critical sense, deprived of human solidarity, broken and tamed by a consumer society—then violence has fully attained its objectives. This is the response to violence of those who do not believe that any action, even non-violent action, can be of any use. Such people have capitulated to the triumph of oppressive and repressive violence, which they see as having the last word in history.

Others, however, feel themselves called to rebellion and combat. Refusing to accept our unjust world, they dream of a more just society. But they think that their utopia can be realised only through recourse to violence. Faced with the existence of 'situations whose injustice cries to heaven,' they have 'recourse to violence, as a means to right these wrongs to human dignity' (Populorum Progressio, *no: 30). But the tactics of counter-violence have only led to still greater deprivation and an even more implacable repression than before.*

It is important to note the starting point i.e., the awareness of a violent and unacceptable situation already existing in the world. The preaching of non-violence in an abstract philosophical perspective that is unaware of social realities, falsifies the doctrine it intends to spread. We ask, is there something in between conformism and passivity on the one hand and violent protest on the other?

The non-violent movement emerges from a double consciousness—one, that the situation of evil needs to be changed, and another, that violent methods generally produce more evil than good. Inspired by



Cesar Chavez who worked among the Chicanos of California

Non-violence, is both a spirit and a method.

the memories of Gandhi in South Africa and India, Martin Luther King, Jr., among the blacks of America, Cesar Chavez among the Chicanos of California, Danielo Dolci within the terrorism of the Sicilian mafia, and the reaction of the people of Czechoslovakia to the Soviet invasion of 1966, the Latin Americans developed their charter. Non-violence, they say, is both a spirit and a method:

As spirit, non-violence takes its point of departure in the conviction that human beings are not irremediably set in mutual confrontation as enemies—that even in the midst of conflict they can always accept the challenge to transcend that conflict through dialogue and love. When conflict springs from an evident situation of injustice characterised by the predominance of power of some persons over others, the weak have the task of undertaking an act of moral pressure. This act needs to be extremely energetic and telling, but non-violent. Its aim should be to reveal to the oppressors their own injustice and to influence them to correct it. In this way both sides break free—the strong from the oppression they are inflicting and the weak from the oppression they have been suffering.

Hence non-violence must begin with the radical transformation of our personal lives ... we need to transcend the selfish instincts that divide us among ourselves and cut us off from our sisters and brothers. We need to conquer the temptation to accommodation and passivity by overcoming the fear that grips our hearts. We must uproot all the seeds of hatred, resentment, and vengeance that may have sprouted up within us and that express themselves in our immediate interpersonal relationships. Non-violence is a response to violence and oppression; only it is not a response in kind. It is not the product of an instinctual mechanism that will determinedly mete out measure for measure. It is a response welling up out of the deepest reaches of our interior liberty, giving us the capacity to repair human relationships by restoring a respect for personhood and freedom. The spirit of reconciliation never springs from cowardice or weakness. Forgiveness is the fruit of love and an act of freedom. It creates freedom in others.

As a method, we must remember that 'non-violence' is really an adjective, not a noun. Or, if it looks like a noun, it is a short form for non-violent action with stress on action. The non-violent movement is like a chess game in which the king is constantly checkmated until it cannot operate any longer. As action, non-violence needs first and foremost a careful social analysis. It makes use of meaningful symbols (remember the Salt March) in order to tap people's power. For power is the essence of non-violence. But not power from outside i.e., power as *satta*, but power as *shakti*—power that comes from the inner world of order.

The question of a just war has seen a long ethical debate that still continues.

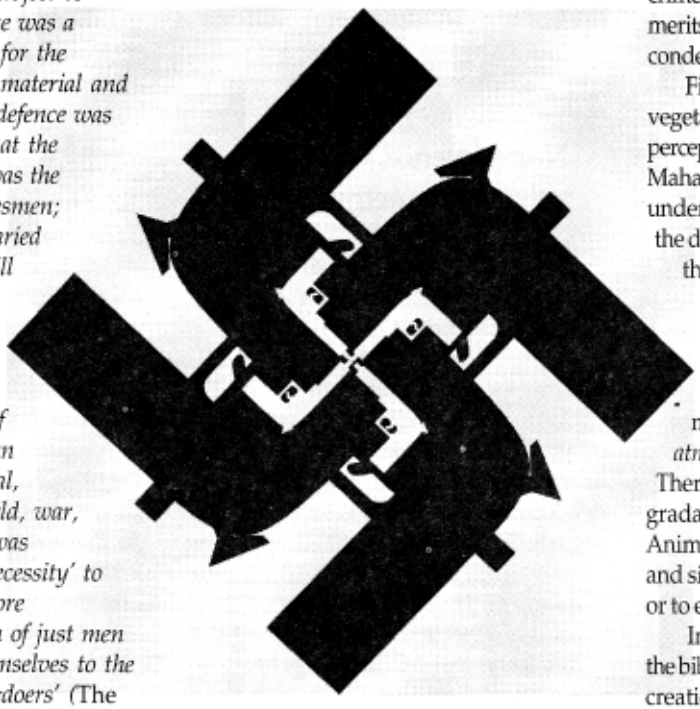
St. Augustine and St. Thomas defined the conditions of its legitimacy. They are: a legitimate authority to declare it a just cause and a right intention, a previous

effort to use other means to avoid war, a prudent hope that the result will be successful and that the good expected out of the war will outweigh the evil of the war itself—these conditions can be reduced to the principles of proportion, reality and discrimination.

In a lecture delivered at an international seminar a few years ago, Dr. A. Parel of Calgary, Canada, said:

What needs to be emphasised is that this [theory of a just war] presupposed a broader theory of man, state and humanity. It assumed that man was a rational, social being though subject to passions; that the state was a necessary institution for the satisfaction of man's material and moral needs; that its defence was part of citizenship; that the security of the state was the responsibility of statesmen; that states, though varied in power and size, still constituted a community of states by virtue of the principles of order and by virtue of the unity of the human race. In such a rational, though imperfect world, war, as Augustine noted, was permitted as a 'sad necessity' to avoid the 'the still more unfortunate' situation of just men having to submit themselves to the domination of 'wrongdoers' (The City of God, *IV, 15). However unwelcome war may be, it was always understood as essentially a human, not a technical or mechanical act, a means of peace, and never an end in itself. Because it was a human act, it was necessarily subject to ethics, and, ultimately, to the ends of political life, the 'good life'. That war is for peace is a fundamental postulate of just war, and this distinguishes it radically from the later amoral or Machiavellian or Hobbesian theories of war. According to Augustine and Aquinas, war was manageable because man is required by his nature to be guided by reason and prudence. 'War purely for its own sake would be stupid,' notes Aquinas (CG 3.34). And Augustine posited the basis for the normative link between war and peace in human nature itself: 'There may be peace without war,' he writes, 'but there cannot be war without some kind of peace, because war presupposes the existence of some natures to wage it, and these natures cannot exist without peace of some kind or another'* (The City of God, *XIX.13). 'Even they who make war desire nothing but victory, desire that is to say to attain peace with glory… for every man seeks peace by waging war, but no one seeks war by making peace'* (Ibid., *IXI, 12)*

With the emergence of nuclear weapons, however, the relevance of the old theologies of 'legitimate war' has really disappeared. The enormous destruction of civil population involved in nuclear war make the petty distinctions of theologians quite inadequate.



With the emergence of nuclear weapons, however, the relevance of the old theologies of 'legitimate war' has really disappeared. The enormous destruction of civil population involved in nuclear war make the petty distinctions of theologians quite inadequate. In this context, even the Second Vatican Council pronounced itself in stronger terms than it did elsewhere: 'Any act of war aimed indiscriminately at the destruction of entire cities or of extensive areas along with their population is a crime against God and man himself. It merits unequivocal and unhesitating condemnation' (*GS*, 80).

Finally, on the question of vegetarianism, there is a divergence of perception between post-Buddha and post-Mahavira Asia and most of western moral understanding and practice. I think that the different anthropologies underlying the ethics of the two continents is the reason for different perceptions. In one, all animals (indeed all living organisms, but especially all animals) are seen as manifestations of the one supreme *atman* that dwells in all of them. There is a continuity, (although also a gradation), among all living beings. Animals are seen as our weaker brothers and sisters and it is illegitimate to torture or to eat them.

In the western tradition, drawing on the biblical accounts of creation, where the creation of the human being has very characteristic features, the 'divine breath' is given only to humans who are entrusted with the whole of creation and made masters of it. As Ignatius of Loyola puts it in the mid-sixteenth century, 'Human beings are created to praise, revere and serve God, and the other things are created to help them to attain the end for which they were created' (*Spiritual Exercises*, no. 23). The absence of a spiritual or eternal personal soul in living organisms other than the human is the reason why they are seen as being totally for the sake of human beings, not ends in themselves. They are *parartha*, not *swartha*. They find the meaning of their temporal existence in being the house, food and help of human

beings.

Some theological views in the Christian world are not satisfied with this instrumentalist understanding of creation, especially of animals. Those with ecological concern tend to reject it, and blame the biblical text, or at least, its later interpretations for the cruelty shown to animals and the ecological disasters over the centuries (although the word 'ecology' itself supposes this view, as it sees the world as the home, *oikos*, of man and woman, not master or mistress of the home).

Moreover, the Bible itself seems to offer a footing for the vegetarian lobby. The food that God gave to humans in paradise is clearly vegetarian (Gen 1:29–30). Only after the Fall, the situation therefore of degradation, God grants also animals as food for humans, provided the blood (symbol of life) is drained out of them (Gen 9:3–4). Not a few Christians ask themselves today, apart from ecological considerations, whether it is not God's design, that we recover through spiritual refinement, the original conditions of paradise.

The fact that Jesus clearly belonged to a non-vegetarian culture leaves many Christians wondering about the ethical value of vegetarianism. We know that the Buddha did not forbid monks to eat the meat spontaneously offered but objected to the killing of animals for food. Today, the question of vegetarianism remains open, though one may believe that it is being increasingly accepted

Finally, the question of violence needs to be put in a metaphysical context that admits the need of change, the importance of the inner power, and the awareness that life needs control to be meaningful. As an ethical ideal, non-violence must be seen in the perspective of dharma and the structures of the universe of which justice and love are the basic texture. In a world ruled by justice, love needs to conquer all the violent trends found in human hearts and in human society.

Spanish-born **George Gispert Sauch,S.J.**, came to India in 1949. After an M.A. in Sanskrit and Pali from Bombay University, he pursued his doctorate on the concept of *Ananda* from the Institut Catholique, Paris. A well-known theologian, he was Professor of Indian and Systematic Theology, Vidya Jyoti College,Delhi; where he is now the Registrar.

Illustrations: **Harish Nair**

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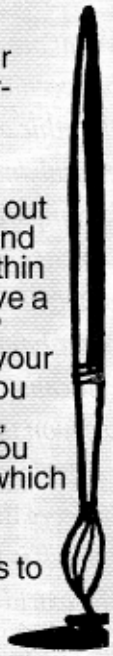
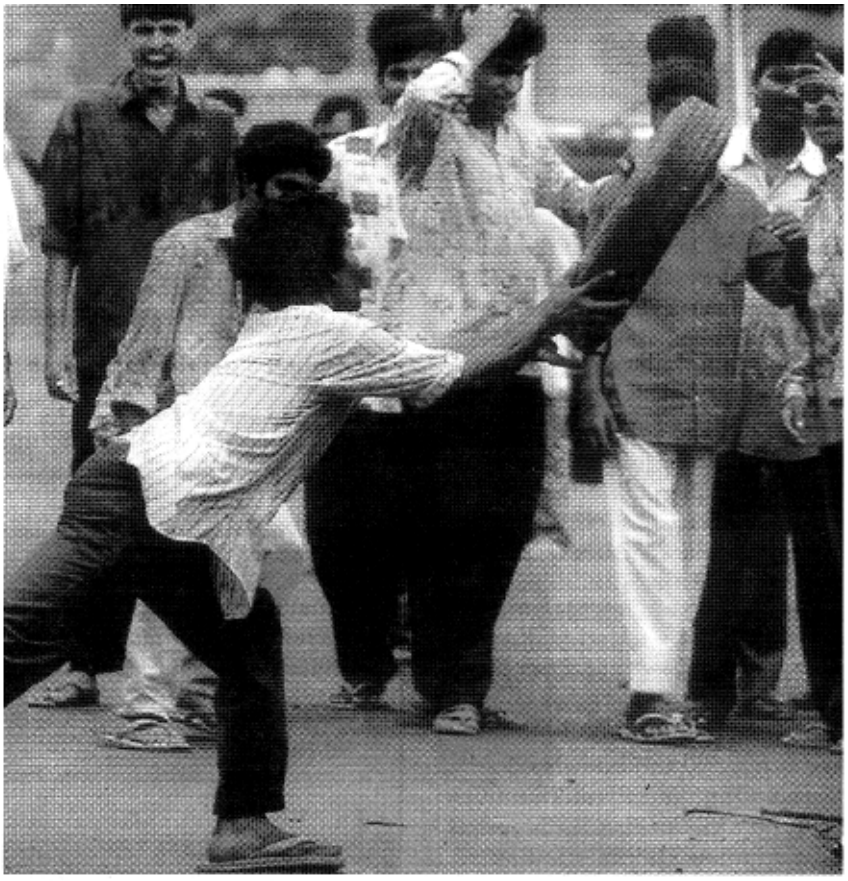


Buddhist Arguments Against the Primacy of Violence

RANJIT HOSKOTE



Breakout of riots following the desecration of Ambedkar's statue in Mumbai

What are the contradictions between theory and practice in the ethic of non-violence—are the ethical and the political perhaps incompatible? Confronted with violence, can a Buddhist really practice non-violence? On the other hand, can Buddhism be radicalised into a political weapon without violating its central tenets? The author believes that the transformation of the self is the only guarantee that the world can be transformed.

1.

A city that is built along a chain of seven small islands is a narrow city; it cannot contain discontent indefinitely, and when that discontent bursts the city's seams, it spills all over the neat barricades of public order. This demonstrates, among other things, the weakness of those barricades, their lack of organic relationship with the needs and aspirations of the people whose supposed participation in the social contract of governance they are meant to embody.

We are speaking of Bombay here—since the early 1980s, the struggles among the city's various ethnic groups and class interests have grown in their intensity; dialogue has long ceased to be a viable recourse in a city that resembles, in many ways, the Chicago of the Prohibition era, dominated by the gun-wielding criminal and his twin in police uniform. And as anxieties and frustrations mount, the rhythms of civic life grow ever more frantic and the dissolution of restraint into violence has become increasingly frequent. Bombay has been savaged by waves of communal rioting several times in the last decade; commuter riots occasionally flare up along the city's suburban railway system, and skirmishes and street battles over politically sensitive issues are not uncommon.

A particular and poignant case in point is the violence which erupted in Bombay during July 1997, following the desecration of a statue of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar in the eastern suburb of Ghatkopar. As with all such episodes, the truth of what happened on 11 July 1997 in the neighbourhood of the shantytown where a detachment of the State Reserve Police opened on a mob of rioters may never be known. Already, the event has become shrouded in competing narratives—the official explanation points out that the mob was about to set a fuel tanker on fire; a Rodney King-style video vigilante is believed to have recorded shots of troopers firing at non-combatants. The favoured Ambedkarite theory is that fire-power was deliberately turned on hapless dalits whose only crime was that they were expressing their outrage; some observers, whose seemingly conspiracist account is nevertheless veined with plausibility, hold that the entire episode was stage-managed by interests eager to discredit the government and the Ambedkarite leadership and turn the violence into political capital. The weeks that followed the mischievous garlanding of Dr. Ambedkar's statue with slippers and the firing in Ghatkopar, were marked by arson, pillage, protest marches and street battles between demonstrators and police. What was most unfortunate, however, was the manner in which the

situation was exploited by a range of political leaders—including the Shiv Sena panjandrum turned Congress demagogue, Chhagan Bhujbal—who seized the opportunity to embarrass Maharashtra's Shiv Sena-BJP government. Worse still, the leaders of the Ambedkarite Dalit community decided that they too would not be left behind in proposing retaliatory action. Dr. Ambedkar's widow went so far as to call for a bloodbath in reprisal. Instead of soothing the anguish of the dalits, who venerate Dr. Ambedkar as a saviour, and persuading them to exercise restraint, these leaders cynically chose to fuel dalit anger with a gospel of retribution. Of course, the leaders who incite people to violence do not die in the street battles they provoke. They remain in the safety of their citadels.

What renders the violence in Bombay doubly tragic is the fact that the people who were transformed into a mob by irresponsible politicians are neo-Buddhists. The dalits turned to Buddhism under the tutelage of Dr. Ambedkar to emancipate themselves from the yoke of the caste system; but the transport of passion that we witnessed, departed widely from the Buddha's teaching of non-violence and self-discipline. In the *Dhammapada* (XVII, 221), the Blessed One says, 'Give up anger, give up pride, and free yourself from worldly bondage. No sorrow can befall those who never try to possess people and things as their own.'

No predicament could illustrate better the contradictions between theory and practice in the context of the ethic of non-violence—are the ethical and the political perhaps incompatible? We see at work in this scenario, the anxieties of choice that result from the seeming incompatibility between precept and practice in the matter of ahimsa. Confronted with the fact of violence, can a Buddhist really practise non-violence, non-harm, non-hurtfulness? On the other hand, can Buddhism be radicalised into a political weapon without violating its central tenets, in a political culture that revolves around the use of intimidation, assault and terror as a first option, and which sets no store whatever by reason, dialogue and understanding?

2.

In an essay pithily titled *The 'Problem' of Ahimsa*, the Buddhist monk and founder of the Western Buddhist Order, the Venerable Sangharakshita observes that ahimsa does not subsist in the elaborate and mechanical observance of precautionary rules against the accidental taking of life. Spirituality consists in the psychological transformation of the human being, and not in legalistic approximations of an ideal pattern of behaviour.

Sangharakshita traces the roots of violence to egotism, the arrogance of the self; non-violence, therefore, must begin in the renunciation of such arrogance and the acceptance of its opposite, understanding and love. He writes, 'When selfish interests and ambitions are thwarted, they turn into hatreds which are violent in proportion to the strength of the frustrated desire…Only by thoroughly uprooting the minutest fibres no less than the thickest and toughest stems of the ego-sense, shall we be able to check the wild growth of hatred and arrest the exuberance of the swelling buds from which runs down the world-intoxicating wine of violence'.

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This, perhaps, explains why every revolutionary ideology that opposes the tyranny of an orthodoxy becomes itself a tyrannical orthodoxy in turn, once it is established in power—it has not opposed tyranny and orthodoxy as such, but merely attempted to displace the particular bearers of these qualities at a particular time. The followers of such revolutionary ideologies as Marxism and Gandhism have come, in time, to forget the emancipatory impulse of each movement; as narrow sectarians, they have behaved with the ferocity or self-righteousness of the worst religious fanatics. And as for Buddhists who involve themselves in violent demonstrations of the ego, they cannot in any precise sense be said to be followers of the dharma at all; for they have forgotten the Buddha's teaching that the transformation of the self is the only guarantee that the world can be transformed.

If the Buddhist tradition offers counsel to the good *follower*, it also offers specific advice to those who aspire to be ideal *leaders*. Mahayana Buddhism enshrines a model of sensitive and caring leadership in the shape of the Bodhisattva—a figure who puts to shame those who misused their popular authority in Bombay.

In the *Vajradhvaja Sutra*, we find the Bodhisattva's exacting vow—'I must bear the burden of all beings, for I have vowed to save all things living, to bring them safe through the forest of birth, age, disease, death and rebirth. I think not of my own salvation, but strive to bestow on all beings the royalty of supreme wisdom. So I take upon myself all the sorrows of all beings.... For it is better that I alone suffer than the multitude of living beings... I agree to suffer as a ransom for all beings... Truly I will not abandon them. For I have resolved to gain supreme wisdom for the sake of all that lives, to save the world.'

As the distance between normative values and actual behaviour in public life grows ever wider, very few of us are so naive as to expect idealism of today's political leaders, much less an adherence to the Bodhisattva's vow. And yet, it is a salutary antidote to cynicism to consider the ten *paramitas* or spiritual perfections which a Bodhisattva is held to have developed. These are *dana*, charity; *shila*, right conduct; *kshanti*, forbearance; *virya*, courage, *dhyana*, meditative absorption; *prajna*, insight; *upaya-kaushalya*, skill in the choice of means to help beings achieve enlightenment; *pranidhana*, resolution; *bala*, power and *jnana*, knowledge.

The Bodhisattvas' exercise of these perfections in the service of others, forms the theme of the *Jatakas*, stories in which the Buddha recounts his previous lives to his disciples. In one of these stories, the Bodhisattva is a monkey-king who guides his followers out of danger, although he loses his own life in so doing; in another, he is the spirit of an ancient sal tree, who offers his life to a king in place of a grove that the king wishes to cut down, so that thousands

of trees and birds may be spared.

While the Indian republic has adopted the Buddhist *dharma-chakra* as a national symbol, it has carefully ignored the Buddha's precepts in its social and political practice. While the Bodhisattva lays down his life for his followers, the typical leader in contemporary India prefers to lay down his followers for his life. But it is not enough to demand greater responsibility of our political leaders; what is called for, surely, is a far more radical and fundamental examination of our motives and choices. What we must do is to question the primacy of violence as a valid course of action, and to question it both at the level of institutional policy and of individual life.

3

The July 1997 disturbances in Bombay once again drew attention to the vexed relationship between ethical practice and political realities. The questions that emerge are—can the Buddha's central doctrine of non-violence be relevant to a dispossessed population like the Dalits, who have had to fight bitterly against social discrimination? What can the Buddha's emphasis on self-restraint mean to a marginalised population which has had to struggle for empowerment and justice? And can we expect India's subaltern classes to renounce militancy and embrace ahimsa, an ideal of conduct that resists adaptation to the pragmatic business of politics? Indeed, it has been argued that the only valid option for those who have suffered the oppression of India's caste-class order is armed struggle.

It must be remembered that the Buddha was no stranger to violence, no sentimentalist. Born to the Sakya warrior aristocracy, he lived—as prince and sage—through one of the most turbulent periods in India's history. During his lifetime, northern India went through the socio-political convulsion that turned the states of Magadha and Kosala into empires extending from theGangetic valley to the Himalayan foothills. The expansionism of these new empires soon claimed the small traditional oligarchies and republics—every conquest was attended by massacre; often, entire populations were enslaved and resettled.

That political climate was not very different from our own. Among the Buddha's contemporaries were such baleful personalities as the bloodthirsty royal cousins, Ajatashatru of Magadha and Viruddhaka of Kosala; the bandit Angulimala; and Devadatta, the Buddha's cousin, who attempted several times to assassinate him. Then as now, many states were controlled by courtiers and charlatans; stable regimes were toppled through the use of agent provocateurs; the indiscriminate use of violence was accepted as an instrument of policy. Despite the provocations, however, the Buddha never wavered in his insistence on ahimsa. In the *Dhammapada* (XIX, 256-57), he says— 'They do not follow dharma who resort to violence to achieve their purpose.'

In the laboratory for ethical experiment that was his world—with a confusing variety of political and cultural choices on offer—the Buddha could see plainly, the disastrous effects of violence. Its costs far outweighed its benefits; it was a whirlpool which sucked society, polity and economy towards its dark centre. By perpetuating the context of its origin, violence produces a state of permanent unrest, a cycle of assault and retaliation, a debilitating continuity of resentment and rage. The Buddha saw that these destructive energies corrode the soul, turn the world into an inferno.

The antidote, the Buddha held, was to practice dharma—by perfecting one's ethical conduct, meditative abilities and wisdom; by treating others with ahimsa, *karuna*, compassion, and *maitri*, loving-kindness. This behaviour was based on the rational principle of karma, in which (as the commentator Eknath Easwaran notes), 'no divine agency is needed to punish and reward us; we punish and reward ourselves.'

When concept and action flow as one, says the Buddha, the seemingly impossible ideal comes to be an integral aspect of the practitioner's consciousness. In political terms, the Buddha's dharma would translate as an attentiveness to the unease of the other; a sharing in the other's anguish; a willingness to concede one's errors and establish a just peace. The point, in dealing with others, is to respect differences; to respect the right of others to believe what they will, without permitting these differences to sour the quality of human relationship. As the cycle of violence in Bombay has demonstrated,

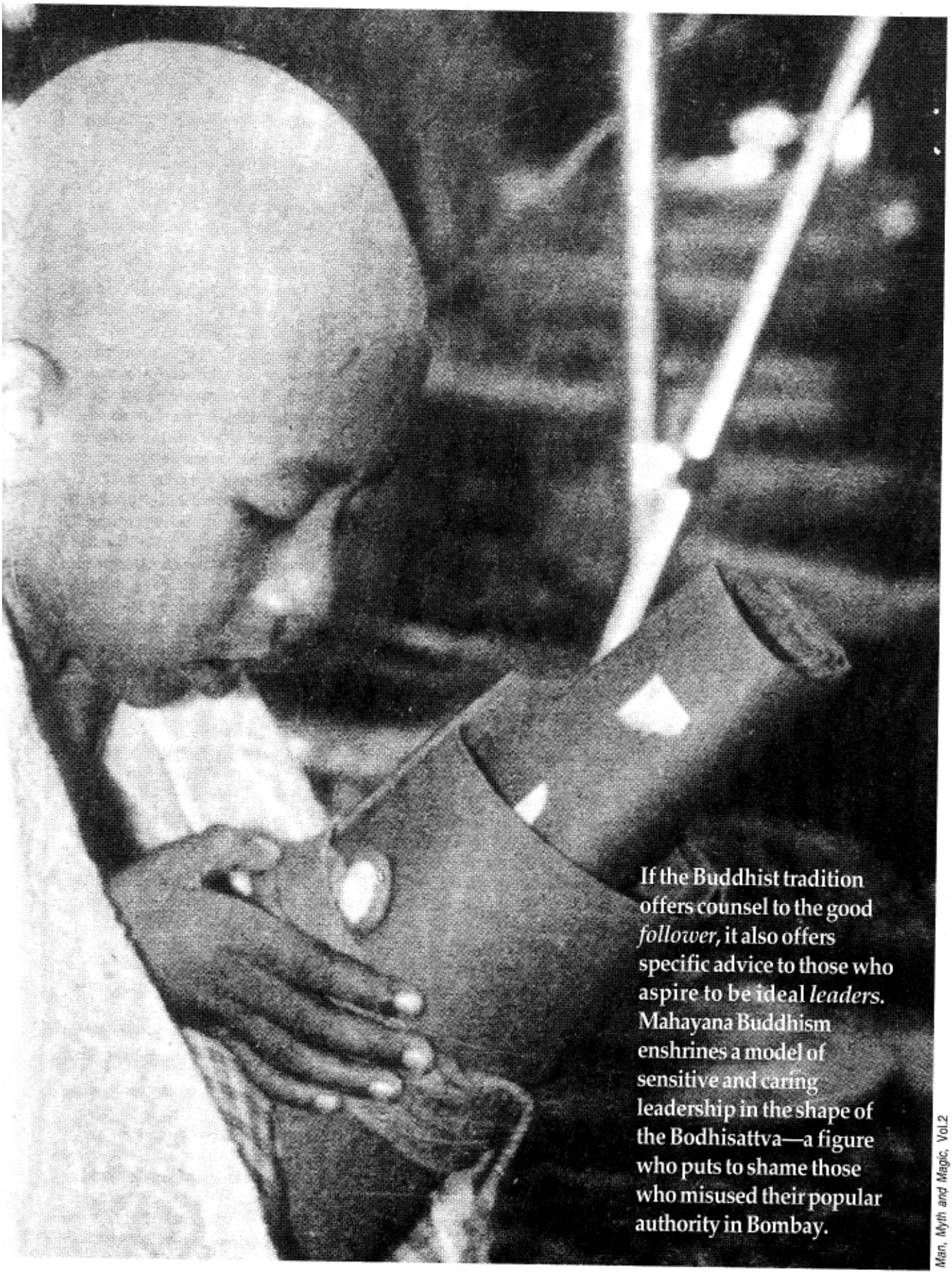
these are skills that most of India's political leaders conspicuously lack. If dharma were made the basis of politics, it might actually help resolve the crises on which the survival of India's parasitical ruling class depends.

4.

The central message of Buddhism is that the Way needs no greater temple than itself, its mindful practice. The Buddha taught that the dharma—with its emphasis on unselfish service, joy, hope and dynamic interdependence—is the moral order of the universe. As such, it needs no symbol other than a life dedicated to right effort and founded on the recognition of the sacred inviolability of other beings.

Even as he lay dying, it is said, the Buddha comforted his cousin and disciple Ananda, with the words, 'This body is not me. Unconfined by mind or body, a Buddha is as infinite as the sky. I live in the dharma that I have given you, which is closer to you than your heart. And the dharma will never die.'

But people in every tradition tend to lose the religious impulse, and retain only the shell of religiosity. They are attracted to the apparent security that a symbol promises, and so the simple, powerful



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Man, Myth and Magic, Vol.2

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Bodhisatva Vajrapani

teaching that the Buddha imparted under a tree came to be enshrined in such elaborate temple forms as the pagoda. Oral tradition suggests that the pagoda's origins lie in the Buddha's answer to a disciple who asked for an abiding symbol to represent the dharma. The Blessed One is said to have spread his patched robe on the ground, then inverted his mendicant's bowl over it and surmounted the assemblage with his staff. This symbolism of austerity and altruism was translated into a monumental form, its four-sided base surmounted by a dome and a soaring spire. But, beautiful as it was, the pagoda soon became a pretext for the commemoration of worldly glory —its patrons overlaid with gold and jewels the spirit of elegant simplicity that had infused the Buddha's demonstration. Today, as a grand new pagoda comes up in Bombay under the aegis of the teacher, S. N. Goenka's Global Vipassana Foundation, we are filled with admiration for the faith that makes it possible. And yet, can we edit out the shanties above which it rises? Perhaps we ought to ask ourselves a basic question: does faith subsist in the symbols of faith, or in some more durable effect that it has on our lives? Is ahimsa in daily life a realistic idea?

These questions may be answered in the most vivid form by pointing in the direction of Dharamsala. For we have an exemplar who lives out these questions in his life, in the celebrated form of His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

At the Nehru Centre, on 24 December 1997, the atmosphere is electric. The Dalai Lama has addressed a large audience on the subject of dialogue between traditions; his discourse over, the Dalai Lama moves to the edge of the stage to greet the crowd, which has already surged forward to touch his hands, ask his blessings. There is not a trace of the exile's bitterness in the royal monk's demeanour; mantled in a burgundy-red robe and looking at his audience through avuncular glasses, he is a warm and inclusive presence. It is at such a moment that you realise why Hollywood stars and teenage students, perfumed grand dames and field-hardened activists all alike, come under this spiritual leader's benevolent spell. Tentzin Gyatso, the fourteenth Dalai Lama, is at once a contemplative philosopher who weaves the intricacies of Vajrayana Buddhism and a practical shepherd who guides his flock through a hostile epoch. Like his thirteen predecessors on the Lion Throne, he is inspired by the metaphor of the two paths—the first, the *nivritti marga* or spiritual path leads the seeker to the hidden city of perfect knowledge; the second, the *pravritti marga* or temporal path is the one along which society evolves in the turbulent world of events.

The apparent duality of the Dalai Lama's personality epitomises the dilemma of the forked path that is found in everyone's life. Some of us may remain ignorant of this dichotomy; but sooner or later, as we exhaust ourselves in the arena of the everyday, we realise how divided and scattered we are, how unanchored in a perennial source of energy.

After all, the Dalai Lama's tradition regards the world as a mirage; the Buddha taught that the world had no permanent essence or abiding reality, that it was a phantasmagoria of images. As Nagarjuna glossed this theory,

The farther we are from the world,
The more real it appears to us;
The more we approach it,
the less visible it becomes...

The world nevertheless possesses a logic of apparent reality—a logic that demands action. And through this action, the individual becomes wholly responsible for his or her own being, his or her development. Therefore, the Buddha's proposition that there is no permanent, unchanging essence in the self and the world is the first step, not towards cynical nihilism, but towards sensitive and constructive action. The Dalai Lama reminds us that our agitated, unreflective lives are conducted largely at the level of the surface, of habit and circumstance; we do not act independently, so much as we merely react to stimulii. And when our lives are no more than an arcade of purposes, our desires drift toward a new display from hour to hour; each day we preen before a new shopfront. Such a life expresses itself through the familiar cycle o momentary passion, menacing boredom and sudden, crippling depression.

Manifesting itself as a continuous cycle

of self-examination and positive action, the inner life gradually radiates through and transforms the outward life. We realise, then, that there is no pre-determined fork in the choices available to us—the two paths, the *pravritti marga* (which seemed dedicated to the worldly plane of *samsara*) finds its fruitfulness in the *nivritti marga* (which is dedicated to nirvana, the state beyond illusion and delusion, attachment and egotism). When the twin lines of the fork have met, we sense the quality of ethical being that the Dalai Lama embodies, and which the Buddha had in mind when he said to his disciples, 'Be a lamp to yourselves, seek refuge in yourselves.'

Ranjit Hoskote is a poet, art critic and translator. His publications include *Zones of Assault*, *A Terrorist of the Spirit* (translation of Vasant Abaji Dahake's poems from Marathi) and *Pilgrim, Exile, Sorcerer: The Painterly Evolution of Jehangir Sabavala* (a critical biography of the distinguished painter. He has been Visiting Writer and Fellow of the International Writing Program at the University of Iowa, USA. His poems, and essays on art and culture have been widely published. An independent curator, he has conceived two exhibitions of contemporary Indian art: '*Hinged by Light*', including the work of Mehlli Gobhai, Prabhakar Kolte and Yogesh Rawal, and 'Private Languages', including the work of Sudarshan Shetty, Ravinder Reddy and Anandajit Ray. Ranjit Hoskote was awarded the Sanskriti Award for Literature (1996) and the British Council/Poetry Society Prize (1997)

EMBRACING AN IDEAL

GAUTAM HARIDAS

Beauty is oft hidden from the avuncular gaze of modern man. More so when the sight is fixed on less sparing tasks than austerity, sacrifice and self-denial. The issue is Napoleonic—what indeed is non-violence, in the context of violence? In a rare moment of sobriety it appears less of a presupposition than our era would have us vouch for. And in an epoch that seems a very centrifugue of uncloaked and arbitrary violence, it seems to be a coy understatement. What has violence done to our lives? Life, *our* life, my life and yours, is a banal spectacle of the gory and mindless brutality that we, a people and a world have inherited. Perhaps it is the savage dance of Kali, perhaps it is the terror of the *asuras*; or the lust of darkness. Is it a mere clash of circumstances, or the heedless rampage of technology, that puts the globe on the brink of an Atlantean destruction ? No one seems to know anyway, and many don't care. The odds are not very even.

Exploitation and greed there always have been in the dealings of the world. But their tell-tale signs no one has cared to mark down with thoroughness. Madness! Madness! as the Red Cross doctor exclaimed at the end of the movie *Bridge on the River Kwai*. All have seen this madness, but who has cared to stem the tide? Certainly, very few.

Were it not for the curious pathos that dramatises struggle and suffering, surely life would have ceased to exist for many. And yet this pathos does not, even to the most careless spectator, relieve the grimness of reality. Violence has coloured our lives so inflexibly, so unjustly, so impunitively, that it even recklessly justifies evil. 'Spoiling of the human brain...' sang Tracy Chapman. How true! We have become aberrations of ourselves.

Yet non-violence there must be, in at least one human survivor among all the rubble and chaos. The heart cannot be so infertile yet that it would resist and waste away the sapling of peace. If that sounds like a comment on our culture, let it be so. If it appears slighly ridiculous and out of place, still, let there be one voice that speaks from the sheer babel that our communication has become. We look to ourselves for answers. In fact, we are in quest of ourselves.

Who or what is non-violence? Non-violence is more than a principle or creed, more than a philosophy even. For philosophy is still, relatively speaking, abstract. Non-violence can be a religion, a many-sided revelation of becoming unfolding out of being, life out of existence, nature out of the soul. It can be radical and transformative, as the Jains practise it. Or it can be Buddhistic - purging and cathartic. It can absolve you of pain, remove hatred and bias, counter sickness and drudgery. Like any garden, the mind is a complex matrix where weeds may grow as well as flowers. It is then to the mind that we look, and to the mind that we suggest an alternative for growth. A thousand angles there are, and more. Enduring reflections of humanity's tale of woe, violet scars on the body of mother nature, slashes in the sky's fabric. A symposium of colours, an organic tempera, it revels in shades and subtext. Violence is the sound hidden in non-violence, dormant in the folds of life. The contrast is delicate and striking. It is not a uniform picture, but clarity invades the seeking thought. Like a Tibetan *mandala*, or spiritual wheel, it embraces all life. This issue of THE EYE seeks to probe the same intricate workings, the same underlying parameters of Truth.

Are you a concerned citizen or organisation trying to work against all odds? It must be lonely out there in the field ... Share your work with readers of THE EYE in our PEOPLE'S STRUGGLES column. It may help you recruit more national and international support. Use us to reach out. Good luck with your efforts!

NON-VIOLENCE AND THE 'NEW VIOLENCE'

ARNE NAESS

The last ten years have witnessed an upsurge of physical violence and a proliferation of recommendations to use manifest violence, physical and verbal. It has inundated colonial, race and educational controversies in Europe, America, India and many other areas. Sometimes, it is systematically and consistently anti-Gandhian, being in part a direct reaction against the limited success of Gandhian and pseudo-Gandhian preaching and practice.

Young leaders of opinion mostly have no knowledge of the revolutionary aspects of Gandhi's campaigns. This seems even to hold good of Indian leaders. Their image of him is more likely to be of a man concerned with means rather than with ends, more concerned with the prevention of open violence than with the elimination of the hidden structural violence built into societies in the form of exploitation. They do not know that Gandhi intended to make, and in fact made, gigantic efforts to destroy structural violence and that his time-table was that of a revolutionary.

Youth in several continents has joined the reaction against the vast flood of hypocrisy, false idealism, suppressed hatreds, and disguised sadism that masquerade as civility, peacefulness and tolerance. The usual descriptions of Gandhian ideology stress moralism, saintliness, humility, sacrifice (conventionally interpreted), and neglect the basic norm that *you* should follow *your* inner voice, *whatever the consequences*. The distortion has contributed to the neglect of militant non-violence as a possible way of protest.

The new emphasis on violence is clearly formulated by such leaders and authors as Frantz Fanon, Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael, C.V. Hamilton and Sartre. In what follows, we limit our references to the writings of these men, and in spite of the many differences in their opinions, we shall refer to their strategy of conflict as that of the 'New Violence'.

Let us compare briefly, the recent norms of violence with those of *satyagraha*. This comparison suggests that on the metaphysical level, it is not the oneness of all life or of humanity that is stressed, but a Lutheran dichotomy between the good and the bad. There is further, a theory of basic contrasts of interest: 'the colonial context is characterised by dichotomy', Frantz Fanon asserts. He continues that 'the zone where the natives live is not complementary to the zone inhabited by the settlers…No conciliation is possible...'

Power is considered largely to be in the hands of the 'bad', and complete self-realisation of the 'good' is *impossible* without violence against the 'bad'. So, even if brutality is in some sense 'regrettable', it is morally justified when considered as unavoidable. But from Gandhi's point of view, even to categorise a human being as bad is verbal violence, because it denies him an increasing self-realisation.

As to the possibility of political liberation in the colonies, Fanon holds: 'For the native, life can only spring up again out of the rotting corpse of the settler'. And again, 'The native…is ready for violence at all times. From birth, it is clear to him that his narrow world, strewn with prohibitions, can only be called in question by absolute violence.'

The future society envisaged by the advocates of violence seems, on the other hand, to be one of non-violence and spontaneous conformity in opinions. These contemporary advocates of violence, in contrast to Fascist theorists, do not see violent activity as an end, but only as a means to obtain a new social order. This belief, however, implies a direct negation of the basic maxim of non-violence, 'the character of the means determines the character of the end'. The 'fanonisation' of means will fanonise the emerging society.

The term 'fanonisation' has been extensively used at universities where sporadic physical and constant verbal violence has coloured their campaigns. The 'establishment' has hit back with renewed structural violence. The verbal violence on campuses is often an agreeable outlet of emotion and has little to do with those aspects of the interaction between the hostile groups that are causally effective. The verbal violence perhaps functions as a secondary emotional gratification, making it easier to accept unwelcome compromises and ad hoc solutions with manifest drawbacks. If this is the case, the Gandhian purist would rather complain about a general lack of mental discipline (*bramhacharya*) than of serious violence. Some of the leaders of rebellion would concede to this, but point out that the lack of mental discipline is due to the frustrations causec by a thoroughly repressive system. One has to mobilise all who are willing to fight the system, whatever their level of mental discipline. If leaders were to demand acceptance of Gandhian norms, too few would partake in the fight.

It would take too much space to go through the rest of the norm-system in our confrontation of Gandhi and the New Violence. Suffice it to say that the tendency to justify or accept violence leads to a thoroughly different *conflict strategy* from that of non-violence.

This piece is an extract from a longer essay of the same name from the book *Gandhi and Group Conflict, An Exploration of Satyagraha—Theoretical Background*

Arne Naess is a philosopher and environmentalist of international repute. He founded *Inquiry*, an inter-disciplinary journal of philosophy and the social sciences.

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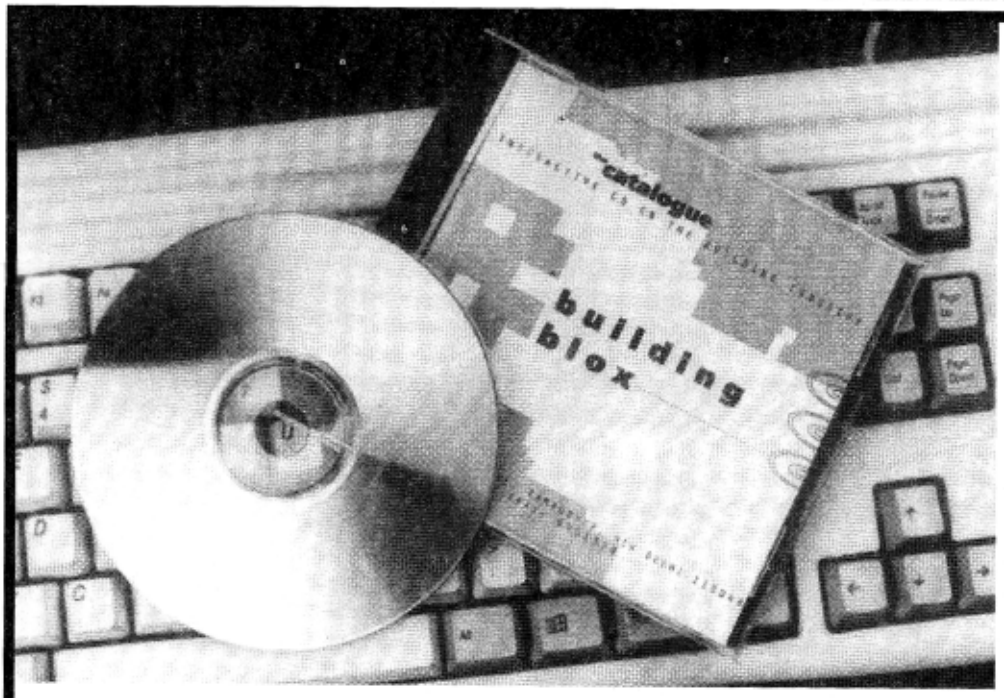

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Durga Mahishasurmardini

PRABHAKAR BEGDE

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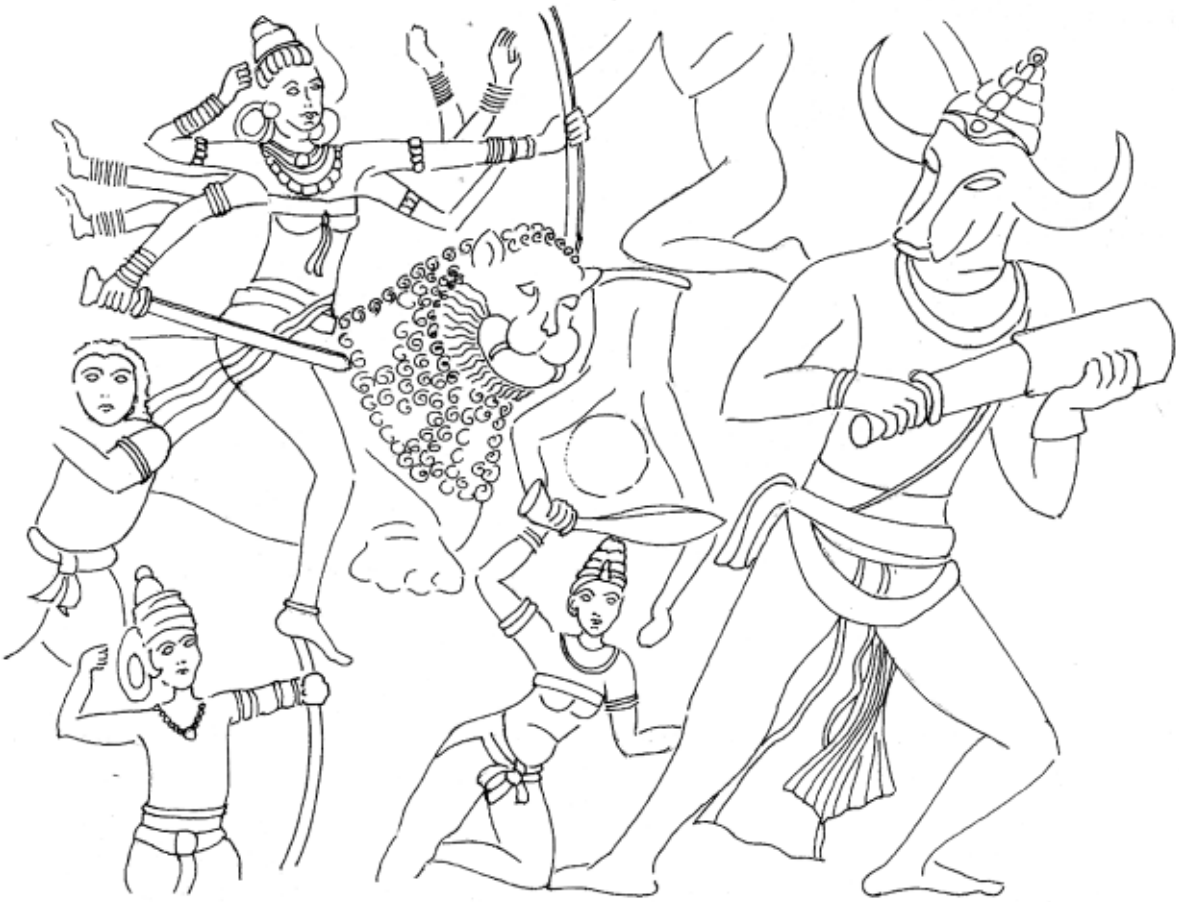


Mahishasuramardini 'slayer of the buffalo-demon', is a name given to Goddess Durga when she slays the demon who has assumed a buffalo form (*Mahisha*), symbolising evil, death and great and undisciplined power. This is one of the favourite themes of Indian sculptors throughout the ages.

Mahishasuramardini is usually portrayed with ten arms (sometimes as many as twenty). She carries a trident, sword, spear, discus, goad, shield, battle axe, rope noose, small bell, a *vajra*, and staff or rod. In early terracottas we see the Goddess virtually crush the demon to death, pressing down on his spine with her bare hands. In other representations, the goddess presses him down with her leg while impaling him with her trident as she lifts his hindquarters by the tail. In yet others, we find the demon emerging in his human form from the neck of the buffalo, while the severed head lies on the earth below. Again in some others, the goddess is shown simply triumphant, standing on the demon's head or resting one raised leg on the recumbent body.

This superb representation (only partly shown here), is somewhat different, where *Mahisha* is conceived as having the body of a human but the head of a buffalo. The eight-armed youthful Durga is mounted on a lion (or *sardula*) and holds a sword and bow. She pulls the bowstring back to her ear, and carries more weapons in her other hands. The demon holds a huge mace (*gada*), and is being showered by Durga's arrows. His demonic followers are heavy, coarse males indicating their earthbound nature, but Durga's followers are slim and graceful, signifying triumph of spirit and energy over crude strength. The demons hold a parasol over Mahisha's head. These two antagonistic groups indicate the eternal struggle between good and evil. The powerful but essentially feminine form of the goddess contrasts with the savage strength of the bull-faced demon. Her eight arms fan out, holding weapons. Significantly, her face does not betray great emotion but stays serene, a smile playing on her lips. There is also emphasis on the feminine attributes of her body and on her ornaments and attire.

Durga Mahishasuramardini
Pallava, 7th century AD
Mahabalipuram, Tamil Nadu.

THE MARTIAL ARTS OF ASIA

Eliminating Violence

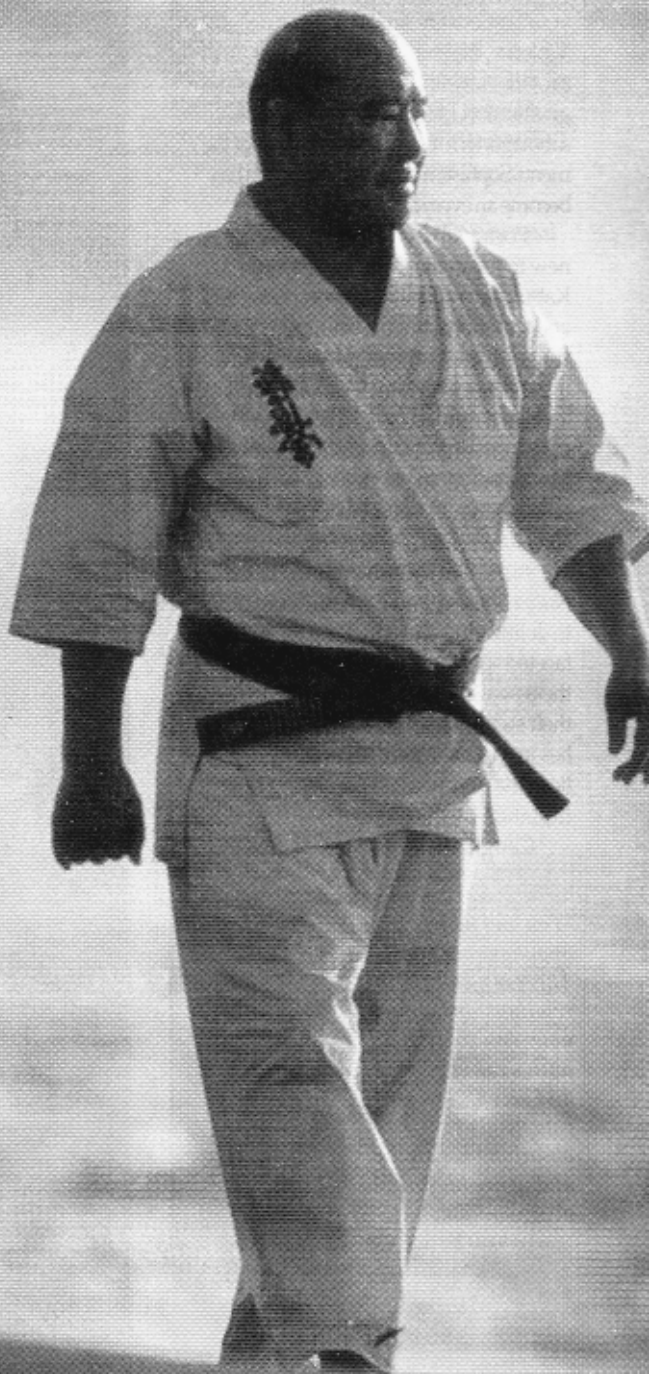
R. K. SINGH AJIT SINGH

We do need more martial arts training ... wherever it is taught, it eliminates violence. That's so overlooked.

Lord Yehudi Menuhin,
Violinist par excellence

The master's actions looked so effortless that I knew there was something below the surface which could not be readily seen, something unexplained.... It was **ki**, *the invisible life force or energy that cannot be seen but that most martial artists develop.*

Joe Hyams



Egged on by a frenzied crowd, two men were engaged in a deadly fight. Not because of enmity, for the sake of personal gain or honour. But fight they must just to survive till another combat, just to avoid instant death. The gladiator must fight even with his best friend and one of them must die. The satiated brutality of decadent Rome, so blunted by bloodiness, could never have enough. The dead gladiator was dragged away with an iron hook to extract the very last drop of savage delight. No dignity even in death. Sounds of orgiastic delights filled the air even as the Empire plummeted towards its fall.

The electronic media now transports to your home every similar fiendish delight. Violence, the brain child of evil genius, provides us with incessant gladiator-gratification. Barbarous murders, rape, sabotage, terrorism, this is only part of the menu. Sophisticated mass destruction has become an everyday affair.

Portrayal of cruelty and violence is not new to Asian theatre. Kathakali and Kabuki are replete with cruel characters and situations. But the beauty, stylisation, suggestiveness and dignity of portrayal in these classical theatre forms elevate it to the level of a refined *rasa*, which then transforms into a lofty aesthetic experience. Moods pertaining to violence such as *raudra* (anger), *veera* (valour), *bhayanaka* (fear), and *vibhatsa* (disgust) are important *rasas* mentioned in the *Natya Shastra*, and each one contributes to delineating and enriching the multi-faceted spectrum called human nature. But the essence of all great art is to portray their sublimation. Someone rightly said 'art lies in concealing art'; it certainly does not lie in the unconcealed pandering to titillation by the media.

Caught in the package of grossly

'You and your opponent are one. There is a co-existing relationship between you. You co-exist with your opponent and become his complement, absorbing his attack and using his force to overcome him.'

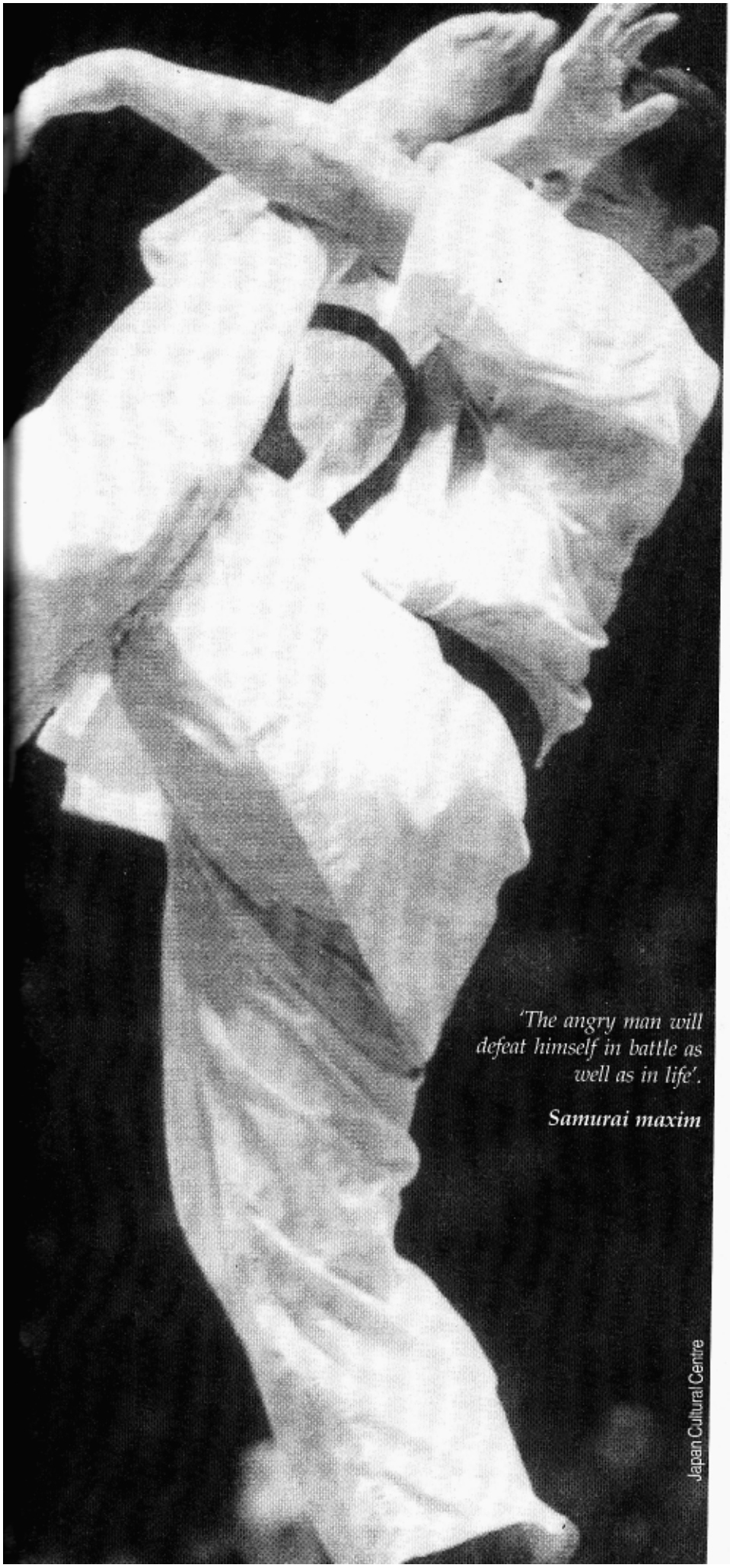
Bruce Lee

'I realised that I had to play to my best ability rather than try to worsen my opponent's play.'

Joe Hyams, author of ***Zen in the Martial Arts***

'Always remember: in life as well as on the mat, an unfocused or "loose" mind wastes energy.'

Bruce Lee



'The angry man will defeat himself in battle as well as in life'.

Samurai maxim

Japan Cultural Centre

misrepresented commercial entertainment are the martial arts. They seem handy as tools of violence and viciousness. The prostitution of this noble art form to cater to a bunch of bloodthirsty action-maniacs is indeed deplorable. Martial arts embody a sense of honour, valour, chivalry, noble-mindedness and self-sacrifice, and certainly not violence or cruelty.

In the East and South Asian traditions, the martial arts were never viewed as mere fighting methods, but as ways of strengthening the body and mind for spiritual development. Each system has a philosophical and religious basis. In their finest form, they are much more than a physical contest between two opponents. Rather, for the true master, Karate, Kung fu, Aikido, Wing-chun, and all the other martial arts are essentially avenues through which they can achieve spiritual serenity, mental tranquility and the deepest self-confidence.

It is believed that most of these martial art forms spread from India. They were carried by harmless Buddhist monks who had to defend themselves from bandits as they crossed jungles and mountains bearing the message of compassion and non-violence. It first went to China and then to Japan through Okinawa.

Bodhidharma, the monk who founded Zen Buddhism, introduced a set of martial exercises in China since he believed that meditation there was lacking in strength. This became the basis for Kung fu. In Japan, the Samurai were influenced by Shintoism, Confucianism and Zen Buddhism. Joe Hyams in his book *Zen in the Martial Arts* writes: 'The role of Zen in the martial arts defies easy definition because Zen has no theory; it is an inner knowing for which there is no clearly stated dogma. The Zen of the martial arts de-emphasises the power of the intellect and extols that of intuitive action. Its ultimate aim is to free the individual from anger, illusion and false passion.' He continues: '… the practice hall—*dojo* (Japanese), *dojang* (Korean), *kwoon* (Chinese)—where martial arts is studied is traditionally called "The Place of Enlightenment". A *dojo* is a miniature cosmos where we make contact with ourselves—our fears, anxieties, reactions and habits. It is an arena of confined conflict where we confront an opponent who is not an opponent, but rather a

The man who is secure within himself has no need to prove anything with force, so he can walk away from a fight with dignity and pride. He is the true martial artiste—a man so strong inside that he has no need to demonstrate his power.

Ed Parker, Kenpo Karate master

'Power of mind is infinite while brawn is limited'

Koichi Tohei

Warrrior from Manipur

partner engaged in helping us understand ourselves more fully'.

In India, the two best-known martial art traditions—Thang Ta of Manipur and Kalaripayattu of Kerala, have survived through centuries and both have a strong spiritual basis with strict moral and ethical codes. They are meant for protection and defence and are opposed to viciousness, cruelty and violence.

The origin of Thang Ta is hoary and full of legends. In the beginning of time when there was absolute nothingness, the Supreme Creator, Atiya Guru Sidaba sitting levitated on his own breath, created Asiba his son, and asked him to fashion the universe. Perplexed as to how to fabricate anything out of a void, he inquired of his father how to go about it. At this, the Creator opened his mouth and asked his son to look inside, where he saw the whole cosmos lying dormant, yet to manifest. He was also instructed to devise a dance named Thengou using the same configuration of nerves and veins inside his father as the model for the pattern of his movements on the ground, on which the universe would rest when it was created. Thus the first act of cosmology was dance, and Thengou was the first dance, made up of a combination of martial art movements.

Thengou, traditionally believed to have been originally performed by the Gods at the time of creation, forms a highly esoteric branch of Manipuri martial arts. These are sacrosanct dance compositions, performed usually by holding either a sword and shield or a spear and shield. There are many variations. The pattern on the ground is based on one of the various sacred coiled snake motifs worshipped in Manipur.

There are various Thengous for bringing prosperity to the land or people, protecting the king, destroying the enemy, etc. They are performed on extremely rare occasions when a dire need concerning the well being of the country arises. The rituals involved are extremely elaborate. All the details including the auspicious moment, ceremonial offerings, purification rites, choice of place, kind of weapon, costume, movement, ground patterns and incantations, mentioned in the sacred texts are inviolable and thus scrupulously followed. It is believed that any mistake in its performance or its employment can bring untold misfortunes to the performer and his family, even to future generations. Thus only great masters with absolute proficiency, experience and pure minds perform Thengous. The gurus, very reluctant to part with this knowledge, choose only those few disciples with proven integrity and maturity.

Thengou training is imparted in a secluded place, away from habitation or a sandy riverbank likely to be washed away in the next floods. For where Thengou is performed, the ground is imbued with such power that anyone desecrating it inadvertently may incur divine wrath. The training begins after sanctifying the land.

The weapons are also considered to have divine origin with symbolic significance. When Til Sidaba (a powerful god) decided to give up his body, different 'boxes' of his remains became various weapons. Swords, spears, etc., do take on varying forms resembling such boxes. Scholars have given elaborate interpretations on their significance and use. The weapon is not an ordinary object; it is energised and infused with a vital divine force and cannot be desecrated by employing it for any degrading pursuit.

Thang Ta demands a great deal of self-discipline from its practitioners. It is feared that certain vices may even jeopardise those powers acquired through years of training, meditation and worship. Some types of food are also forbidden.

One important ethical code mentioned in the scriptures is that even in the midst of war, one should not harm an enemy who is running away, who is hiding out of fear, who is crying out of fear and who has asked for protection. Violating any of this is considered a great sin. For a warrior, every moment of his life is guided by certain

rules. Eating, sleeping and even breathing are well regulated. Martial arts training, initially, is more physical in nature, but as one advances, it is more spiritual. The secrets of *yantra, mantra* and *tantra* are gradually revealed to the student. The warrior's main and only concern ought to be the protection of the land, people, king and the weak. This sense of selflessness cannot be better symbolised than the costume which he wears to war. It includes a sacred cloth usually worn by the dead, thus preparing him for the supreme-most sacrifice.

The Thang Ta of Manipur can be divided into three parts:

(a) The ritualistic and spiritual (described above).
(b) The decorative, which constitutes dance movements or the aesthetic aspect.
(c) The combat, which deals with actual fighting techniques, both defensive and offensive. It covers various weapons as well as unarmed combat.

In actual practice, however, all these branches are interrelated and one cannot be completely free of the other.

The aesthetic or dance aspect of the martial arts of Manipur demand a great deal of balancing and body control. Dancing skills add dexterity in wielding the weapons. In fact, this has greatly influenced the dance traditions of Manipur. In our times, many dancers incorporate the martial dances, enriching their repertoire with great effect.

Try Softer

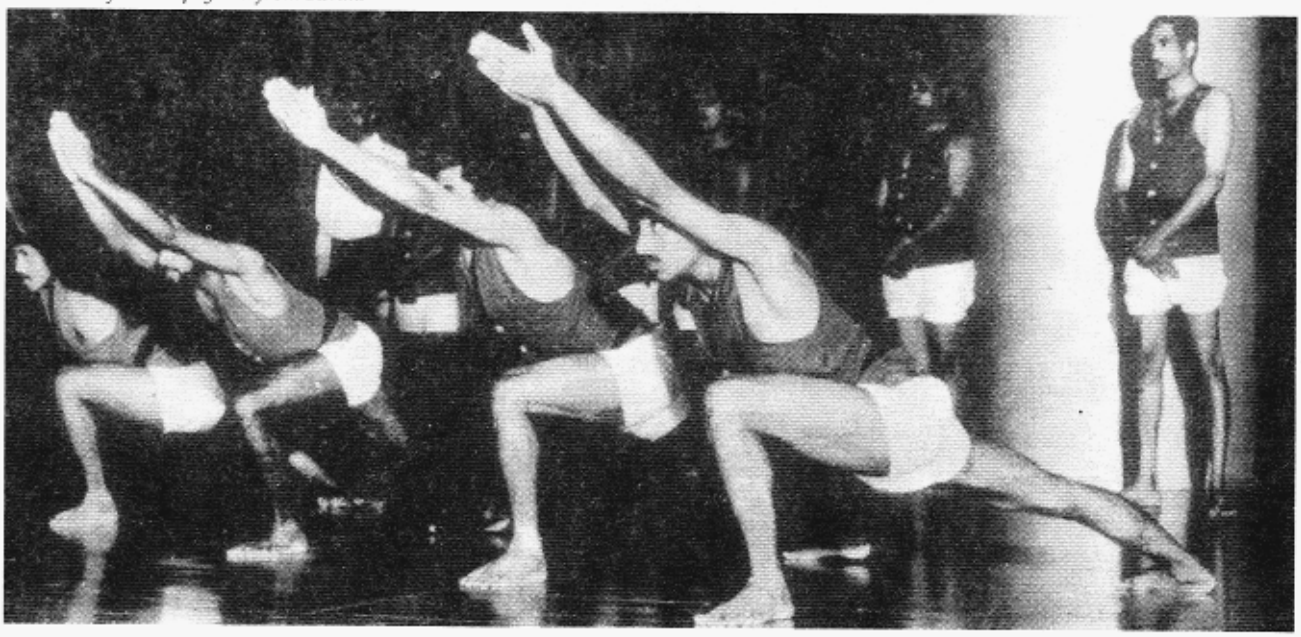
A young boy travelled across Japan to the school of a famous martial artiste. When he arrived at the dojo *he was given an audience by the* sensei *(master).*
'What do you wish from me ?' the master asked.
'I wish to become your student and become the finest karateka *in the land', the boy replied. 'How long must I study?'*
'Ten years at least', the master answered.
'Ten years is a long time', said the boy. 'What if I studied twice as hard as all your other students?'
'Twenty years', replied the master.
'Twenty years ! what if I practice day and-night with all my effort?'
'Thirty years', was the master's reply.
'How is it that each time I say I will work harder, you tell me that it will take longer?' the boy asked.
'The answer is clear. When one eye is fixed upon your destination, there is only one eye left with which to find the Way.'

In the combat part, the training is extremely thorough and demanding. It makes a person physically and mentally so alert and well integrated that he becomes virtually impregnable. At the same time he is also packed with tremendous striking power. A trainee usually specialises in one weapon though he must learn the use of all the main ones.

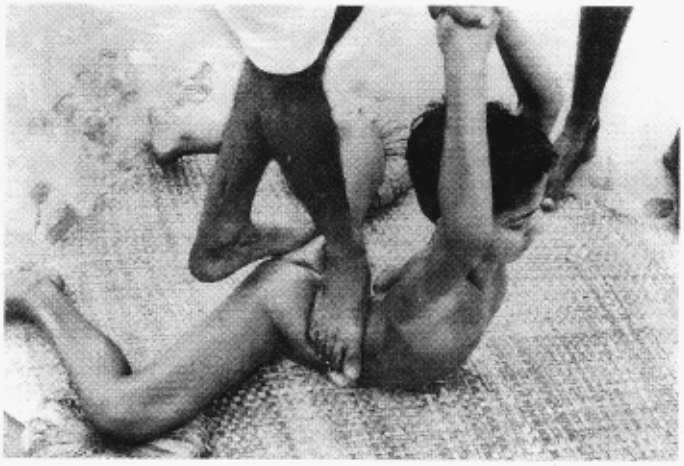
The same is true of Kalaripayattu, Kerala's major contribution to world culture. G. Sankara Pillai (*Marg*, Vol.34, No.3) writes: 'An argument put forward by some practitioners claims that Kalaripayattu is the original source of Karate.... The interpretation of the word *kara-te* meaning empty handed, which reminds one of the various patterns of fight and defence with bare hands in Kalaripayattu, gives some strength and credence to this movement'.

Closely related to Kalaripayattu is the healing science of Ayurveda. Young trainees are massaged with various oils to enhance suppleness. Perfect health is the underpinning of perfect alertness and concentration. The *kalari* or the training

Students of Kalaripayattu from Kerala



Courtesy: Marg Vol. 34, No. 3



Henri Cartier-Bresson

For the uncontrolled there is no wisdom, nor for the uncontrolled is there the power of concentration; and for him without concentration, there is no peace. And for the unpeaceful, how can there be happiness?

The Bhagavad Gita

area is a virtual temple when the practice is on. The *kalari*, with its elaborate rituals, becomes the epicentre of received energy and dispersed energy. 'The deities of the kalari range in number from seven to twenty-one … but the presiding deity in all cases is the Kalari Bharadevata ….This *devata* has no link with the "Devi" that the Aryan priests deified later in the temples but she represented all the "ferocious manifestations of the Mother Goddess".'

It is not difficult to see Kalaripayattu's influence on many of the performing arts of Kerala. Whether in the ritualistic art forms like Theyyam or Padayani or the more evolved ones like Kudiyattam or Kathakali, 'hand gestures perhaps owe something to the *kalari* fighter…. Even visitors to India like Philip Zarelli have grasped the real significance of Kalaripayattu: it is a unique training system for both the east and the west. There is training leading to balance, control and flexibility of mind and body. Psycho-physical integration becomes [the trainee's] foundation for self-awareness and performance'.

We can only conclude that the martial arts of Asia are born of a supreme commitment to restraint, control and the synthesis of strength and softness, just as much as they are opposed to savagery and violence. No wonder that the great musician, Yehudi Menuhin is reported to have said, 'We need more martial arts training … wherever it is taught, it eliminates violence.'

Guru Singhajit Singh is an internationally known Manipuri dancer, choreographer and teacher. He has pioneered creative work in this dance form, having produced thirty eight full length dramas. He has performed all over the world and received great acclaim. He was given the Padma Shri and the Sangeet Natak Akademi Awards apart from various fellowships to dance academies. He performs with his wife, Charu Mathur and lives in Delhi.

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THE SOURCE OF VIOLENCE

Violence has varied sources. In a radical departure from conventional theories on violence, the author links sources of violence to sources of creativity.

G. N. DEVY

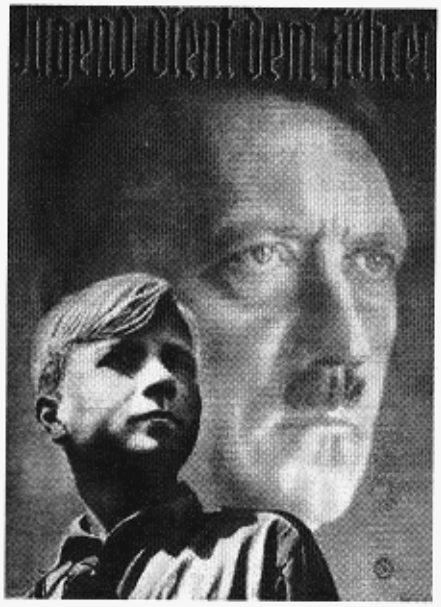
When we look at the history of the twentieth century, one thing which stands out very clearly is that it has been the most violent of all centuries. The number of people killed in the present century by human beings has been greater than that in all the preceeding centuries put together. The technology of killing has become progressively sophisticated. And the fact is that we have allowed this escalation in the quality of violence. At the same time, it is the twentieth century that has invented all manner of medicines to reduce pain and suffering. We now have increased leisure and charitable organisations. People fighting for freedom is a recurrent and regular phenomenon. The twentieth century has freed masses of people from tyranny and dictatorship, and democracy has been established as a general way of life. There is phenomenal spread of literacy and education and growth in the volume of information. Communication has never before been so easy and so far flung.

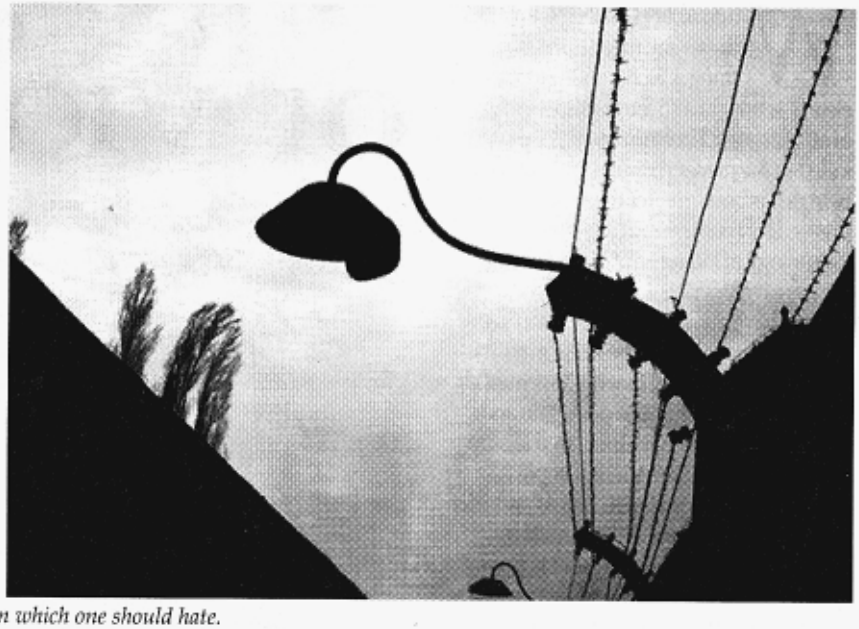
The duality in our twentieth century existence, however, cannot be ignored. On the one side, we have a tremendous increase in the quality and volume of violence; on the other, we see so much effort being invested in the development of human happiness. So if one has to write the history of the twentieth century, what would be the best way to write it? It is a difficult question. Is it possible that the increase in leisure and the improvement in medicine are in some mysterious ways linked to the increase in violence? Is it that the same story exists not in different scripts but in the same script that we have so far not deciphered? In order to find some answers, it may be necessary to explore the phenomenon of violence in our time.

It is generally argued, that as far as human beings are concerned, there are four sources of violence—faith, blood, soil and tongue. But this argument, to my mind, is a bit lopsided. For, does not faith inspire some excellent human values? Is it not love of language which makes creators out of people who write great books—poets for instance? Is it not true that soil inspires patriotism? Does not blood keep people together? Feelings of community arise out of these blood ties, the sharing of the history of blood, as it were. So, blood, soil, faith, and tongue can also produce and sustain the positive, the non-violent, bringing in the emotion of love not hatred.

Parabola Vol. XXII, No. 2

Another argument, forwarded by scientists to explain violence is as follows. The argument is that violence is after all a reflection of something that happens inside one's brain. According to them, when the chemistry of the brain is disturbed, a certain chemical, serotonin, is in short supply. The shortage of this chemical causes the flaring of passions and loss of self-control. Proper levels of serotonin in the brain makes a person steady and reasonable. However, all violence in the world is not only the sum total of violent tendencies among individuals in this world. There is a certain order of violence, a substance or energy, which exists independent of individuals. In





Alan Jacobs

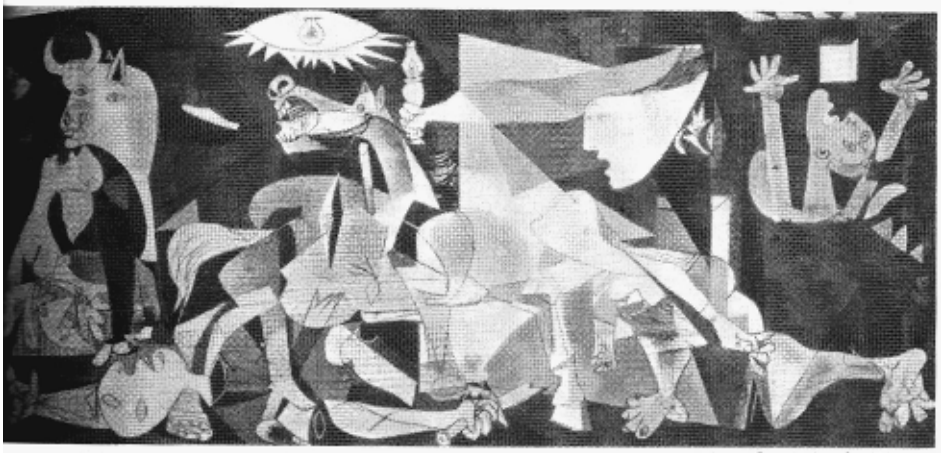
Hitler developed a poetics of hatred and a style in which one should hate. He then became a victim of the poetics of violence. The barricades at Auschwitz.

other words, violence does not emanate necessarily from individuals. Proabably, individuals are enveloped within violence. So while the chemical theory of violence may be effective in analysing and curing a sick person, it is not enough to understand violence of our times. The truth of the matter is that no human being is more violent than other human beings. Every minority in any given community has to bear the accusation of being a little more violent than the majority. This faulty argument is used in order to deny a separate identity to the minority. So the genetic theory of violence is a fallible theory. No race, no class or group of people can be inherently more violent because of genetic factors.

Emile Durkheim has an interesting anthroplogical observation to make. He makes an enquiry into what produces creative people, artists and thinkers. His answer is that creative people violate established social norms, be they norms in their styles of thinking, or laws made by the state which are punishable. Durkheim then points out that criminals also break the law. He argues that in a given society, if all criminals are removed and everybody is good, then even the slightest gesture which is otherwise not offending might be treated as an offending gesture. People will then invent ways of creating a 'criminal' in that society. Then there will be yet another law, because law has a compulsion to catch up with society. If creative people are a century *ahead* of the rest, criminals are a century *behind* the rest. Durkheim proposes that in order to have creative persons in a society, we need criminal persons, because what they do is basically similar. Unless there are criminals, there cannot be creative people. In Durkheim's understanding, violence is a necessary condition of social progress and change. That seems to be a proper scientific view of social dynamics. Yet this cannot explain the *source* of violence. Durkheim can only explain the *placement* of violence in terms of a given social composition. The question 'what is the source of violence' as distinct from 'what is the source of creativity' still remains with us.

There is a certain order of violence, a substance or energy, which exists independent of individuals. In other words, violence does not emanate necessarily from individuals. Probably, individuals are enveloped within violence.

Adolf Hitler almost anticipated this question and wrote a long reply in the form of an autobiography, *Mein Kampf*, in which he narrated the story of his life. His origins were humble and he was not sure who his father was. He became a soldier though he wanted to be a painter. First he joined a design school in Vienna but the war started and he joined the German army. His side was defeated in the War and he was wounded. One does not know how exactly, but it is likely that Hitler became impotent. When he came out of the War, he found that there was unemployment everywhere and he started working on some construction site. There, while the others drank beer, Hitler drank milk and while the others sang folk songs he read history. In the process, he developed an ideology of his own. Soon, he joined a newly founded party called the National Socialist Party and gave it his ideology of hatred. That was the key to Hitler's success. Hitler developed a poetics of hatred and a style in which one should hate. The style was, as Hitler puts it, to raise untruth to the status of truth. Then he discovered the importance of propaganda. During the twelve years of his regime, Hitler slaughtered millions of Jews and other innocent people. One theory is that Hitler was so violent because he was impotent. This is the 'impotence theory' of violence. Some unduly cruel people have that streak in them because of a certain biological and psychological inadequacy. Yet this is not a good enough theory to explain why Hitler was so violent. Hannah Arendt argues that this hatred did not come entirely from his mind and that it



Guernica by Picasso

existed even before Hitler came to power. He merely channelised it to get into power and then became a victim of this poetics of violence. Arendt maintains that hatred against the Jews dates back to the nineteenth century. It existed all over Europe. One can capitalise on this tradition of hatred to gain political authority. So the theory that Hitler's violence can be explained away with reference to his psycho-physical disorder cannot be the underpinning of all forms of violence.

There is yet another approach to violence. Many sociologists who have done work on criminals argue that people tend to become violent if there is economic deprivation. The argument, therefore is, that poor people are violent. It is almost like the argument that all Jews are spies. It is easy enough to discern that not all poor people are violent but that much of the violence unleashed on the world is designed and packaged by rich people and rich nations. Violence today, like any other commodity can be bought and sold. The truth regarding the belief that poor people are violent, may actually be quite the contrary. If a person is deprived of opportunities (as the poor often are), his impoverishment weakens his ability to fulfil his desires as does his ability to protest. Such a person gets de-humanised, turns into an obedient animal and starts behaving like a 'beast'. Therefore, the propaganda that those who do not get enough share of the nation's wealth are at the forefront of riots and protests is erroneous and baseless. In fact, it is the middle classes and the educated ones who usually adopt this function.

There is a story which Vijay Tendulkar told me. Tendulkar was once travelling in a local train when an educated boy who had lost his job, got onto the train and started stabbing people with a knife. Drunk as he was, his fellow passengers overpowered the young man. At the next station, they pushed him down and started beating him. So far it was self-defence. But then many people who were not travelling in the train joined the crowd. They were educated middle-class people. They joined the others in beating up this man and they beat him till he was dead. Tendulkar asked, what was the source of violence in that apparently educated lot who were not at all affected by the young man's assault? Tendulkar's question implied an answer and his answer was that possibly, the gratification of desire in excess of one's requirements could make one violent. Strangely, this was the explanation that Tagore gave for creativity. Perhaps the source of creativity and violence are the same. That gratification of desire in excess of requirement causes violence is reminiscent of Tagore's theory of creativity that excess of passion is the cause of art. He writes: 'The ambition of Macbeth, the jealousy of Othello, would be at best sensational in police court proceedings; but in Shakespeare's dramas they are carried among the flaming constellations where creation throbs with Eternal Passion, Eternal Pain'. The similarity between the two theories is a clue to understanding the nature of violence. This takes us back to what Durkheim said, that in order to have creative people you must also have criminals in society. This further takes us back to Hitler, according to whom, violence is as truthful as art, for as Freud put it, they both come from some disorder in the unconscious. So violence and creativity may be inter-related or mirror images of each other—one destroys, the other creates. At least, there is one great similiarity between the two: both are spontaneous, unless structured. The case of 'individual violence' has tremendous spontaneity as in creativity. And both art and violence embody a certain absurdity. If violence comes out of the impossibility of relationships between persons and other persons, art tries to build new relationships challenging established sets of relationships with Nature, God, Society and Man which may well push us to the verge of the unreal, the insane. But the difference between violence and art is that the artiste knows his limits and can bring one back to the human fold; violence alienates and is altogether unsavoury. While art humanises, violence de-humanises the subject. However, the language of violence and the language of art can be very often similar. As a matter of fact, art is created by being violent to its medium.

The gratification of desire in excess of one's requirements could make one violent. Strangely, this was the explanation that Tagore gave for creativity. Perhaps the source of creativity and violence are the same.

Behind violence lies a mysterious attraction for blood as something with tremendous magical sway and capacity. Blood always has an inexplicable impact. And this attraction of experiences related to blood is at the back of violence, just as behind all art lies an attraction for experience related to truth as the substance of the world.

G. N. Devy is Chairman of the Bhasha Research and Publications Centre, Baroda. He is also Director of the Sahitya Akademi project on tribal literature. In 1993, he was awarded the prestigious Sahitya Akademi award for his book *After Amnesia*. His other publications include *Critical Thought* (1987), *In Another Tongue* (1993), and *Of Many Heroes* (1998).

The Child in the City

IMAGES AND MEANINGS

PHOTOGRAPHS: ACHINTO
TEXT: V. RAMASWAMY

Achinto, a documentary photographer, and V. Ramaswamy, a social activist, have, for the last seven years, been engaged in a 'vocational friendship' based on their overlapping concerns about Calcutta. Besides resulting in a number of photo-essays, publications and exhibitions, this collaboration has helped each of them to learn and grow through a widening of their individual perceptions and sensibilities, and been a journey from a sphere dominated by discourse, intellect, logic and politics, towards a subjectivity of consciousness and being, feelings, vision and intuition. ***The Child in the City****, an exploration in imaging and imagining, was begun in late 1992. A presentation based on this work was made, to much acclaim, in December 1997 at the International Seminar on Art, Aesthetics and Society organised by the Calcutta Metropolitan Festival of Art, to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of India's independence. An extract from this presentation is reproduced here.*

CHILD ON COBBLED STREET

Does the Child have a City?
Whose Child is the City?

We are becoming an increasingly urban society. As our towns and cites struggle in the face of immense difficulties, what kind of formative environment are our children growing up in? What is the future that is being shaped in this interface between the child and the city? How does the child perceive the urban environment? Is it violent, does it foster violence? How supportive or conducive is this environment for the biological, social, intellectual and spiritual development of the child? In its early years, when life for the child is discovery, a continuous unfolding, does the city—its built environment, its open and public spaces, its activities and events, its institutions, its culture, its values and mores—enrich this process of learning? Or does it distort and stifle?

How does the city beckon?
Toy, playmate,
Lit up by the joyous child
As they lock in an embrace of mutual celebration? Or does it terrify?

We can assert, quite simply, that if cities represent the high point of our common civilisational heritage, being the springboard for people to reach out to ever higher levels of achievement in the sphere of culture; and if today's children are going to be the shapers of our future—then, it only follows, logically, that the upbringing of the child in the city is something that has profound meaning and significance.

Why did the Pied Piper take away the children of Hamlyn?

DOLL

The City as School
City Life as Education

The work of Patrick Geddes (1854 – 1932), the Scottish town planner, who is considered to be the father of town planning in India for having worked extensively in India during the period 1914 – 24, is particularly important for our concerns. Geddes had a long and intimate association with India and Calcutta and was a close associate of Rabindranath Tagore and Jagdish Chandra Bose. He travelled extensively in the Indian subcontinent as a town planning consultant and made surveys, proposals and plans for some fifty towns. Most notable among these is his two-volume report on the replanning of Indore. He also prepared a report on area improvement in Barra Bazar, Calcutta in 1919.

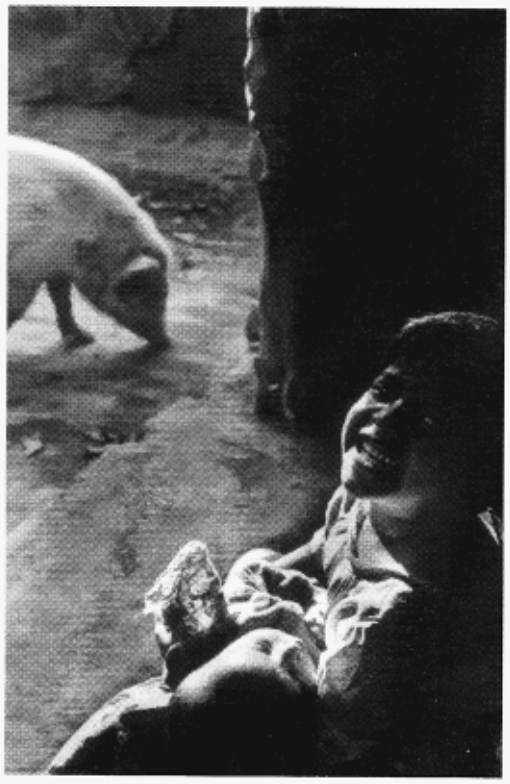
Geddes' work in town planning may be seen as building upon the basic dictum of the French thinker Auguste Comte that 'the living body requires an environment appropriate to it, which cannot vary beyond certain limits in any direction without rendering life impossible'.

Geddes saw cities essentially in civilisational and educational terms. The life experience of the child in the city was at the very centre of his thinking about the city. For him, the most fundamental task of a planner was to teach the children: introducing them to their still undestroyed and indestructible heritage of the spirit, and at the same time training them to help in every home, village and city with the rebuilding of their shattered material heritage. For him education meant the training in the use of the three h's: the hand, the heart and the head:

'The child in sunshine sees the violet shadows upon the dusty road just as the impressionist paints them: it is only the mis-educated grown up, who has been trained from old pictures, or perhaps still more from printed descriptions of them, who persuades himself that the same shadow is brown. To escape from common literary epithets and to be encouraged to observe how often earth is purple, grass gold, and the sea all possible colours is a training which most of the older generation have missed and which the younger are not by any means sufficiently receiving.'

'Town planning is not mere place-planning, nor even work-planning. If it is to be successful it must be "folk-planning". This means that its task is not to coerce people into new places against their associations, wishes and interest—as we find bad schemes trying to do. Instead its task is to find the right places for each sort of people, places where they will really flourish. To give people in fact the same care that we give when transplanting flowers.'

'We have to rebuild the schools; but not to pass examinations in, or provide returns for metropolitan clerks to pigeon-hole; but to teach the children.'



GIRL, BABY, PIG

There are flames dancing in the farthest corners,
throwing their shadows on a group of mourners.
Or are they lighting up a feast of poetry and wine?
From here you cannot tell, as you cannot tell
whether the colour clinging to those distant doors and walls is that of
roses or of blood.

The City from Here
Faiz Ahmed Faiz

What happens to a dream deferred?
Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or does it fester like a sore—
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over—
like a syrupy sweet?
Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.
Or does it explode?
Langston Hughes

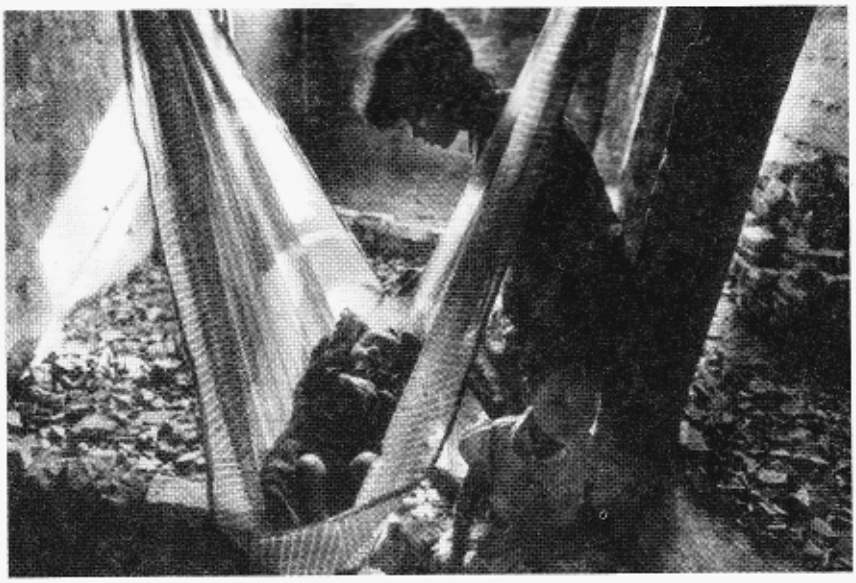
Lights of the city.
Memories:
of conflagrations of riotous arson
spreading hatred's poison fire,
and funeral processions
of once beloved saints.
Destructiveness is the outcome of that unlived life through the curtailment of a child's expansion. And instead of the wholeness of the expansive tree, we have only the twisted and stunted bush.
Erich Fromm

BOY WITH DAGGER

There was a major communal riot in Howrah in 1950. Post-riot analyses dwelt upon the degraded conditions prevailing in the *bastis*, which contributed to the build up of rage that eventually erupted in riots. Today, infant mortality rates in Howrah's slums are still considerably higher than in non-slum areas.

How will I return to you, my city, where
is the road to your lights?
My hopes are in retreat,
exhausted by these unlit,
broken walls,
and my heart, their leader,
is in terrible doubt.

City of Lights
Faiz Ahmed Faiz



BABY IN HAMMOCK

City as temple
City Life as Prayer

'Of all the ways that lead to the high city, none is more far than the road of filial devotion.'

Gautama Buddha

'Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.'

Jesus Christ

'Islam means respect for God and kindness to humanity. Every child possesses these qualities at his birth. Every child, no matter where it is born, is a Muslim.'

Prophet Muhammad

'To the child, everyone is equal, he has no discrimination of high and low, and consequently no distinction of caste.... Nor has he any hatred, or any idea of cleanliness and pollution.

He is truly wise who has seen the Lord. Such a man becomes like a little child.

How sweet is the simplicity of the child. He prefers a doll to all the wealth and riches of the world.

God is to be reached through childlike faith and guilelessness.'

Sri Ramakrishna

GIRL SWINGING FROM TREE

The Songs of the Piper

1.
The Piper
come to re-assemble,
boatman,
come to ferry,
the children of the cave
from the shores of plague and deluge
to futures anew.

Rekindling sensibility,
rejoining the psyche,
reintegrating personality and community,
reintroducing homage,
reuniting the family
of humanity and all living beings,
respiritualising man,
regreening earth,
resacralising life.
Renewing civilisation,
culture and civics,
rebuilding city
and citadel,
discovering metropolitance,
fulfilling sovereignty
and governance,
establishing the dominion
of the Lord
over sense
and sensibility.

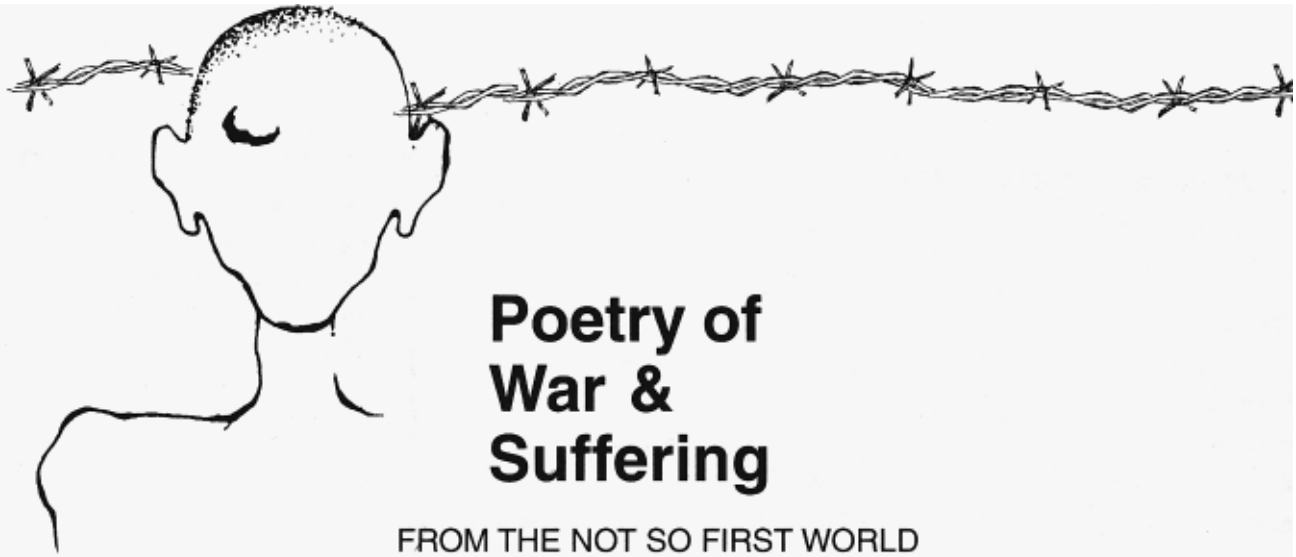
2.
Verdure
as the sap of love and devotion
courses anew
through the thirsty capillaries
beneath earth's parched soil,that run
through the petrified hearts of men
but in whose depths swirl
the waters of meek humanity.

3.
Let's make love
Through looks and smiles,
Signs and gestures,
Words and terms of endearment,
And share intimacy
Through kind thoughts, speech and deeds.

4.
Come, friends, children,
Let's resacralise life
And make it a festival
Of celebration,
Song
And dance,
Colour
and beauty,
Joy
and awe,
Reverence
And homage,
Duty
And responsibility,
Giving
And receiving
Kindness
and consolation,
Sacrifice
and cooperation,
Growing
And raising,
Learning,
And teaching,
Blessing
And being blessed.

Achinto, 39, is a Calcutta-based photographer, who has extensively documented people, life, labour, community and habitat in India's villages and cities. Leaving home after completing his schooling, Achinto lived and worked for four years in Calcutta's Asha Niketan, a community of handicapped people. Graduating in Social Photography from the communications institute, Chitrabani, Achinto has been working as a freelance documentary and professional photographer from 1985. His work has been critically acclaimed and been published and exhibited in India and abroad.

V. Ramaswamy, 37, is a Calcutta-based public policy consultant, teacher, social activist, writer and poet, and has been working on issues relating to urban poverty, housing and renewal since 1984. Formally trained as an economist, he has been associated with Unnayan, a Calcutta-based social action group, the National Campaign for Housing Rights, and TARU, a research and consultancy network, and also taught economics at St. Xavier's College and Calcutta International School. He is currently advising Oxfam (India) Trust on their Urban Poverty Research Programme based in nine Indian cities, and is guiding the Howrah Pilot Project, a programme to spearhead renewal, beginning from some of the most degraded slums in one of the world's most blighted cities. This involves efforts to build a community-based youth movement for public service, in Priya Manna Basti, a predominantly Muslim workers' settlement, and initiate a participatory and sustainable programme to eliminate service latrines from Howrah's slums.



Poetry of War & Suffering

FROM THE NOT SO FIRST WORLD

A simplicity that is not barren, a mockery that is not a taunt, a precise inflection of horror that does not become maudlin—this is the quality that underlies the tragic verse that emerges from the voices of suffering. Slender, stark detail emerges as sound structures fall into place with the jingle of mild melodrama and the bitter, pungent imagery of the sadism of pain. It is evident that the creativity has been stemmed into absent-mindedness, typically the reaction of the victims of violence. There is no fear, but rather a certainty of pain and death. A marsh-like sadness shifts and shuffles its feet, shedding embarrasment and aloofness. Tragedy is made vivid by the harshness of experience. The words are sudden, the pitch even, the language dry of hope. The silhouette of a stilletto, it is the reedy voice of blackened souls.

THE EYE presents a selection of contemporary poems of war, suffering and survival from different countries of the not so first world. Many of these countries have been or still continue to be engaged in strife and war, men fighting men. The poets presented here on pages: 76, 118, 129 are some of the best in their respective countries.

THE MIDDLE EAST

ISRAEL

The Diameter Of The Bomb

The diameter of the bomb was thirty centimetres
and the diameter of its effective
range—about seven metres.
And in it four dead and eleven wounded.
And around them in a greater circle
of pain and time are scattered
two hospitals and one cemetery.
But the young woman who was
buried where she came from
over a hundred kilometres away
enlarges the circle greatly.
And the lone man who weeps over her death
in a far corner of a distant country
includes the whole world in the circle.
And I won't speak at all about the crying of orphans
that reaches to the seat of God
and from there onward, making
the circle without end and without God.

Yehuda Amichai

Tourists

Visit of condolence is all we get from
them.
They squat at the Holocaust Memorial,
they put on grave faces at the Wailing
Wall
and they laugh behind heavy curtains
In their hostels.
They have their pictures taken
Together with our famous dead
At Rachel's Tomb and Herzl's Tomb
And at the top of the Ammunition Hill.
They weep over our sweet boys
And lust over our tough girls
And hang up their underwear
To dry quickly
In cool, blue bathrooms.

Yehuda Amichai

PALESTINE

A Forehead and an Anger

My homeland! O Eagle that sheathes its beak of flame
In my eyes
Through the wooden bars.
All that I possess in the presence of death
Is a forehead and an anger.
I have requested in my will that my heart be planted as a tree
And my forehead as a house for the skylark.
O Eagle of whose wing I am not worthy
I prefer the crown of flame.
My homeland! We were born and we have grown in your wounds
And we have eaten acorns
That we may witness the flutter of your wing
O Eagle that heavily lingers in fetters for no reason
O legendary death that used to be loved
Your red beak is still in my eyes as a sword of flame.
I am not worthy of your wing
All that I possess in the presence of death
Is a forehead and an anger.

Mahmud Darwis

LEBANON

The Strangers

Our graves are dark on the hill,
night is falling in the valley
is walking in the snow and among the trenches
my father returns killed on his golden horse,
from his lean chest
the cough of the woods
and the rustle of broken wheels shake,
the moan lost among the rocks
sings a song to the lost man
to the blond children and the dead flock on the stone river bank.

O mountains clad with snow and stones
O river that accompanies my father in his estrangement
let me be extinguished like a candle before the wind
suffer like water around the ship
for pain outstretches its betraying wing.
Death hanging from the horses flank
enters my chest like the look of an adolescent girl,
like the moan of a bitter cold wind.

Muhammad al-Maghut

SYRIA

Young Time (fragment)
The City

Our fire is advancing towards the city
to demolish the bed of the city.

We shall demolish the bed of the city
We shall live and cross through arrows
into a land of perplexed transparency
Behind that mask hanging from the rock
Which turns round the whirlpool of terror
Round echo and words
We shall wash the stomach of day, its intestines and its foetus
And burn that existence patched with the name of the city
We shall reverse the face of presence
And the land of distances in the eyes of the city.

Our fire is advancing and grass is born in the rebellious ember
Our fire is advancing towards the city.

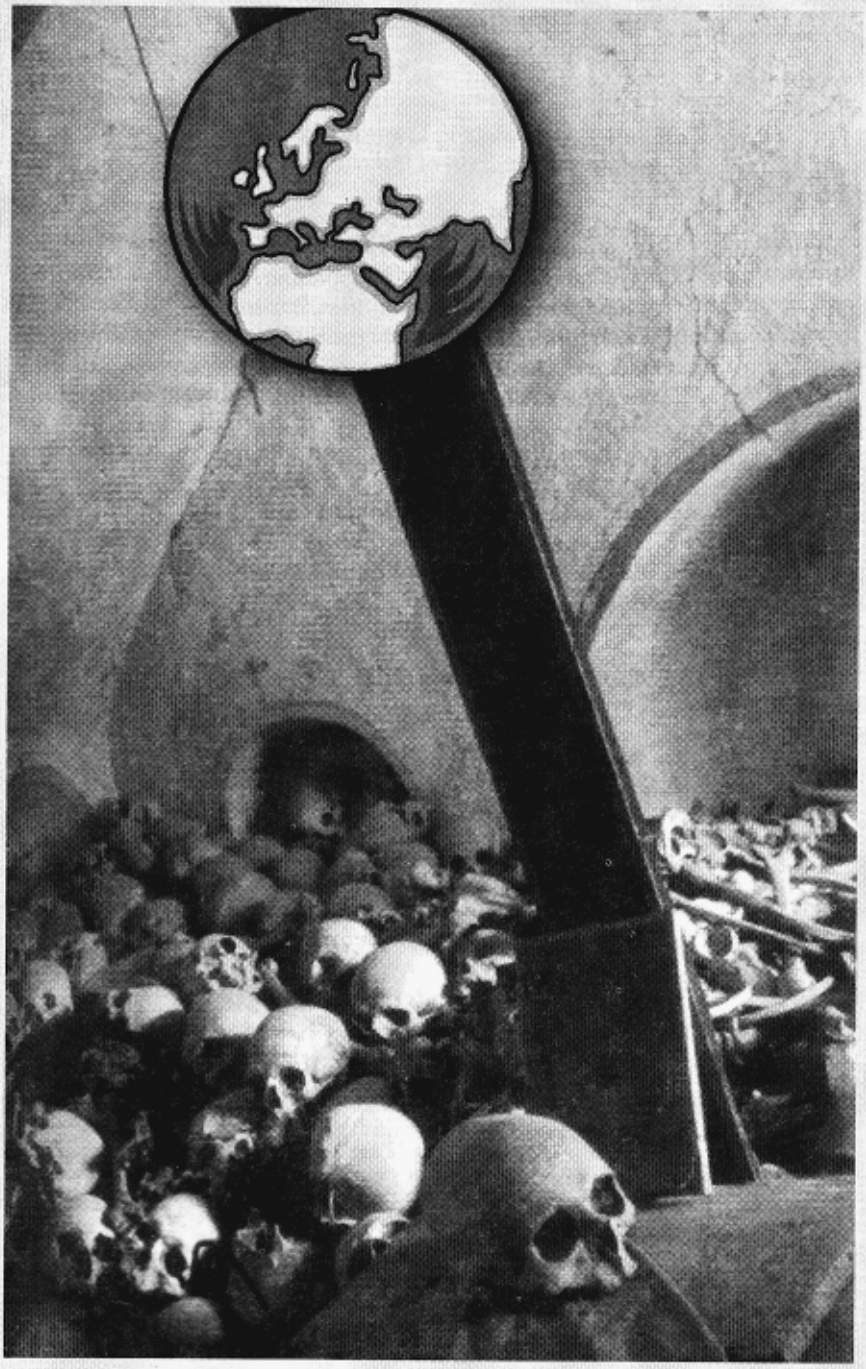
'Adonis'—Ali Ahmad Sa'id

All the poems on war and suffering carried in this issue of THE EYE have been selected and introduced by Gautam Haridas.

'EPISTEMIC VIOLENCE'

ADITYA NIGAM

At the heart of the great universalist discourse that asserts a particular common and inevitable destiny of all humanity—the advent into the kingdom of Reason as Universal History and Freedom—lies the reality of a violence. This violence I will call, altering somewhat the sense it has already acquired, 'epistemic violence', for it attacks our very ways of knowing and defining ourselves, and therefore the world.



'Among the nations during the course of centuries ... India was known as the mine of wisdom .... They have studied arithmetic and geometry. They have also acquired copious and abundant knowledge of the movement of the stars, the secrets of the celestial sphere and all other kinds of mathematical sciences .... Of all the peoples, they are the most learned in the science of medicine...'.

This is what Abu'l Qasim Said bin Abdur-Rahman bin Muhammad bin Said al-Andalusi, an eleventh-century Spanish-Muslim scholar, had to say on the state of science in India. We also know that print technology, gunpowder and mathematics —the three major weapons of colonialism in its conquest of the Orient, were really born in the East. As the Caribbean writer, Aime Cesaire, the father of the idea of 'Negritude' remarks in his *Discourse on Colonialism*, these are the 'few small facts' that resist the doctrine that it was the West which brought the beacon of Science and Reason to us unfortunate ones, wallowing until then in superstition and black magic. 'To wit, the invention of arithmetic and geometry by the Egyptians ... the discovery of astronomy by the Assyrians ... the birth of chemistry among the Arabs.' And yet, the potency of the idea that the light of Reason was brought to the dark continents of the East by the colonialists, continues to reign supreme to this day.

The facile opposition between the spiritualist East and the rationalist West was a western invention. To be precise, it was an orientalist invention that has been internalised by us. The traditionalists have accepted this description of themselves as much as the modernists. What 'they' had but 'we' did not, was the potent combination of the great new discourse of Science and Reason with the economic and armed might of Capital. It was the discourse of Reason, in which attaining the light of science and rationalism was seen as the final telos of all humanity, which made possible the idea of the 'civilising mission' of the white man that, in conjunction with the outward expansion of capital, manifested itself as the project of colonial modernity.

To say that science was developing as much within the pre-colonial societies of the East, is not to argue that we should justify ourselves in the terms set by the West. The

idea is to simply highlight the fallacy of the opposition that is sought to be built in such a straightforward and unproblematic way. It is to underline that the problem is not so much with science and rationalism as with the particular discursive configuration within which we are forced to confront it.

At the heart of the great universalist discourse that asserts a particular common and inevitable destiny of all humanity—the advent into the kingdom of Reason as Universal History and Freedom—lies the reality of a violence. This violence I will call, altering somewhat, the sense it has already acquired, 'epistemic violence'[1], for it attacks our very ways of knowing and defining ourselves, and therefore the world. I am therefore resisting the simplistic idea that the 'Indian' ways of knowing are brahminical and 'Hindu' as opposed to the modern and scientific/rationalist ways of knowing that the West brought to us, and therefore, the choice is clearly one between reaction and progress. It is true that since knowledge was primarily the concern of the Brahmins, dominant ways of knowing were brahminical. However, they were not the only ways and if one believes that domination never goes without some forms of resistance, one must also try to recover the other ways of which we have ample evidence in our own history. Within Indian philosophy, there are not a few instances of major battles that were fought on this question and at least one of them, *Charvaka* or *Lokayata* was all but obliterated by the dominant currents. This recovery therefore, does not seem to be possible without first challenging the simplistic opposition set up in the currently dominant understanding. This idea of 'epistemic violence' then, is radically different from the widely prevalent liberal idea of the violence of all 'isms'. Unlike the liberal argument which presents all 'isms' other than itself as violent, the notion of 'epistemic violence' enables us to see the world of knowledge as one more arena where the struggle in society at large is carried out and where different belief systems confront each other, but where matters are settled through power rather than through rational argument —the victorious idea is not always the 'correct' idea.

Sure enough, India was no repository of pure reason and the scientific temper. It was always, within certain limits, full of a multiplicity of beliefs and rituals, many of which appear repugnant to the modern

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The 'civilising mission' of the white man, in conjunction with the outward expansion of capital, manifested itself as the project of colonial modernity.

mind including mine. However, it must be emphasised that in the affairs of human societies, even such repugnant ideas cannot be simply legislated out of existence, for this is one area where the Newtonian law of physics probably applies to the social world—every action begets an 'equal and opposite' reaction. The introduction of the idea of epistemic violence is simply meant to underline this crucial reality and is really a space-clearing move that can enable us to look for the currents that were repressed in the course of history. As an idea, it is as crucial to the study of the history of ideas in the heyday of brahminism as it is in the subsequent postcolonial context.

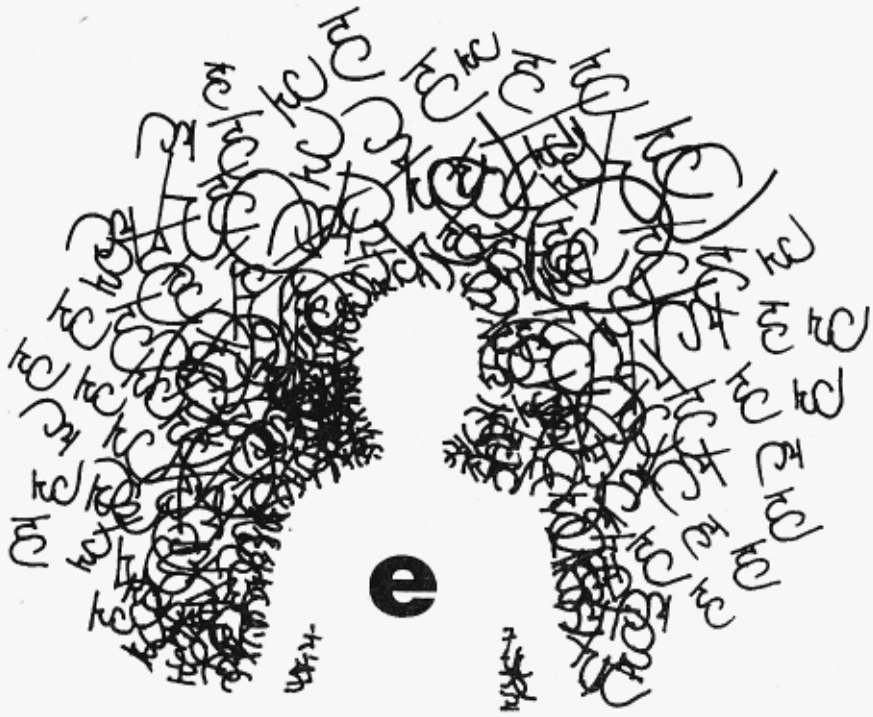
Political theory in India has only recently and falteringly started grappling with the entire range of complicated issues involved in the colonial/postcolonial predicament. The key to the success of this enterprise lies in being able to understand the meaning of the colonial experience and the constitution of the subjectivity of the colonised within it. The Tunisian writer Albert Memmi, in his *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, asks about the colonised: 'But who is he? Surely not man in general, the holder of universal values common to all men. In fact, he has been excluded from that universality, both in word and in fact. On the contrary, what makes him different from other men has been sought out and hardened to the point of substantiation … To expect the colonised to open his mind to the world and be a humanist and internationalist would seem to be ludicrous thoughtlessness. He is still regaining possession of himself, still examining himself with astonishment, passionately demanding the return of his language' This then is our point of departure.

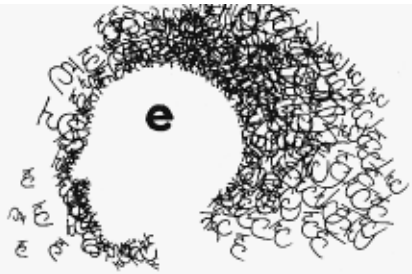
Central to any political theory of colonialism must be at least two concerns that constitute and shape the colonial subject(s). These I will call, after Albert Memmi,

(i) the social and historical mutilation of the colonised; in other words, their denial for centuries, their 'exclusion from history, community and citizenship'—a denial into which is written their difference.

(ii) the cultural schizophrenia that lies at the heart of the constitution of the colonial/postcolonial subject.

Memmi delineates two moments of the constitution of this subject when he talks of two historically possible ways of realising this subjectivity. The first moment of this constitution is mimetic, for the colonised





'In the colonial context', says Memmi, 'bilingualism is necessary. It is a condition for all culture, all communication, all progress ... but colonial bilingualism cannot be compared to any bilingualism ... [It] means participation in two pschyical and cultural realms'.

native here mimics and emulates the colonial master. This may happen in the way of the colonised subject defining her/his political project of emancipation in terms of the larger theoretical and epistemological criteria of the West, in terms of its philosophy and its achievements as the embodiment of progress and modernity—what Partha Chatterjee calls the 'thematic of nationalism'. It may also happen in a second, more subtle way of the native/colonised subject recasting her/his own religious/spiritual apparatus in order to summon it to provide the epistemic justifications for redefinitions of selfhood and enable it to play a new political role. The latter is the way in which say, Vivekananda, even while maintaining the spiritual superiority of India and the East (against the degenerate materialism of the West), begins to recast 'Hindu' religion in the image of Christianity, as Ashis Nandy has argued. From Vivekananda to Gandhi, all the thinkers in this tradition reject the epistemic basis that asserts the superiority of the materialist West, even though they differ in their nuances.

The second moment of this constitution is actually already beginning to emerge in the above description. For, in countries like India, this could never be based on the complete rejection of the self. Even the former category of responses, represented by the modernists who celebrated the idea of the eventual triumph of Reason and Science, were responses from the same ground as that of those who seemed to entirely reject the West. All the thinkers/leaders in that tradition too, were nationalists, as much as those who formed the latter current. Their ground too was the ground of native/colonised existence. We only need to look at the concerns of the early communists/socialists or of leaders like Periyar and Ambedkar to be able to understand that what attracted them to ideas of socialism/liberalism was the idea of an India that was not merely politically independent but also free of social oppression. Where the two differed and parted ways then, was the way in which they assessed the strengths of the colonial power and what they considered crucial to their sense of selfhood, in other words what they considered the indispensable and the relatively discardable aspects of their tradition. For those who privileged the West's achievements in material, scientific and modern terms, the road to salvation lay to a large extent, in the first option pointed out by Memmi. Let me qualify that I say 'to a large extent' because the condition that Memmi talks of is a more violent context in which French colonialism sought to assimilate the native population. This option to him, therefore, is the option of assimilation, which is a different story altogether. On the other hand, those who thought that the West's political and armed might was the key to its strength, also sought to masculinise and militarise their own 'religion' (like a Vivekananda or in a different way, a Savarkar or a Golwalkar), while holding on to the notion that it was still spiritually superior to the Europeans. The reasons why different sections made different choices are of course, more complicated than we can go into here. Suffice it to note that there was no essential Indian self and different people understood their 'Indianness' in radically different ways. However, one of the key mediating factors was the attitude the players held towards the violence and oppression of the old order. This itself was what made all the difference. In Europe and the West, the ideas of the philosophies of the Enlightenment were rooted in the struggles within their respective societies and so the choice was a more straightforward one between the old and the new. In India and much of the colonial world, the rejections

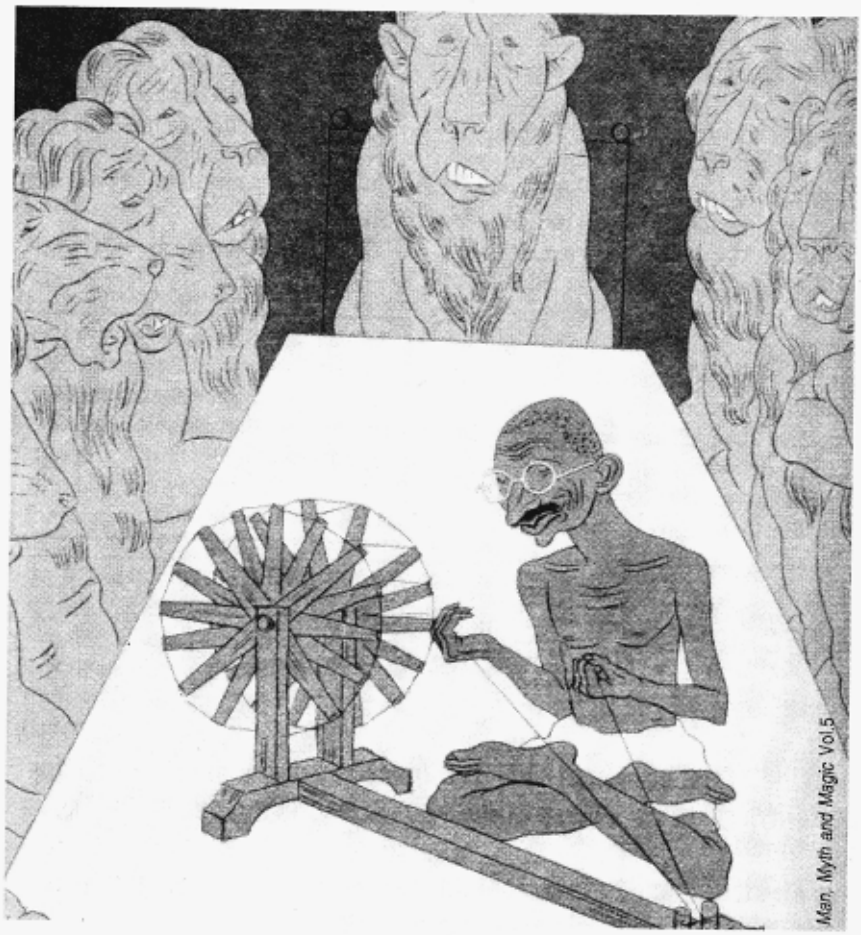
of past violences went along with the need to redefine the self in relation to a set of new ideas that were tied to the West that was actually colonising it.

Put differently, the reconstitution of selfhood, the urge for political liberation and of self-determination, was already being defined by the parameters laid out by the colonial encounter. All the responses were irretrievably lodged within them and there was no longer an 'innocent pre-colonial self' in existence any more. And the colonial encounter was no benign dialogue: its terms had already been set by the fact of domination—a relation of domination and power that manifests itself in language, religion, thought and culture, in the widest sense.

'In the colonial context', says Memmi, 'bilingualism is necessary. It is a condition for all culture, all communication, all progress ... but colonial bilingualism cannot be compared to any bilingualism...[It] means participation in two psychical and cultural realms'. The two are in conflict and an unequal one at that. In language inhabits thought, specific ways of being, thinking and knowing. The rupture involved here is a violent one—unprecedented in history—based on a hegemonic ideological configuration. The entire Macaulayan project of creating a new middle class, Indian in the colour of its skin and English in its tastes and ways of thinking, can be seen as an instance of this.

I do not wish to reduce the entire colonial experience to the grand design of Thomas Macaulay, as though that constituted an uninterrupted master narrative of a 'colonial discourse'. But it does constitute an important dimension of that history and the bilingualism ushered in by it is something we must still deal with. It can be immediately pointed out that after all, the attraction that people from Raja Rammohan Roy to say M. N. Roy and the communists felt towards the liberal/socialist ideas were hardly violent—that they adopted them 'of their own accord'. One only need look at the

If history is the arena of struggles in contemporary India, this struggle cannot be accomplished without making an adequate critique of the legacy of colonial modernity and the epistemic violence entailed in it.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present moment of globalisation to see that the violence of insertion into a different global rhythm and logic of production, of highly accelerated time, governed by an entirely different set of rules, is so insidious that it hardly appears to the naked eye as violence. Add to this, the circumstance where the revulsion against the oppressiveness of the old internal order was at its height, and colonial statecraft with its insistence on 'the rule of law' and 'equality before law' might have appeared almost benign. However, the case of communist/socialist ideas was, anyhow quite different, for by the time they arrived in India, they not only represented the dissenting traditions of capitalist modernity, they were also unflinchingly on the side of the colonised. Let us return to bilingualism as the defining principle of the cultural schizophrenia of the postcolonial subject. What does this predicament do to the subjectivity of the colonised? How does it continue to mark his/her very being? I will conclude my discussion by drawing attention to the situation in what is quite unselfconsciously called the 'Hindi region'.

The designation 'Hindi region' is quite problematic for another kind of bilingualism that exists here. Unlike other parts of the country, where the regional language—Bengali, Malayalam, Punjabi, —is the common tongue of most of the

population, irrespective of community, in contrast, the language identity in this region is meshed with community identity, Hindi being the 'language of the Hindus' and Urdu being 'the language of the Muslims'. To call it the Hindi region is to exclude the minority Muslim population from the description. And yet, this divide was not always there. Right upto the nineteenth century, they were just one language. Urdu was Hindi, and it was the place of its birth. It was the contribution of one Gilchrist and the Fort William College in Calcutta, set up for the colonial administrators, to have introduced the threefold distinction between Hindi, Hindvi (also known as Hindustani) and Urdu. It is well-known how subsequently, in the way the nationalist imagination was being worked out in this region, the Hindi–Hindu–Hindustan triad came to be a key slogan of the movement. Linguistic, community and national identities were fused into one with not an inconsiderable degree of success. From the insistence for Devanagari script, through the Nagari Pracharini Sabha, the cultural agenda of nationalism moved into the 'purification' of the language, which essentially meant expunging 'foreign words' (that is, words of Persio-Arabic descent) from its vocabulary. What happened to the two languages since is a story that is well-known and need not be repeated. Urdu was gradually killed in the post-independence era, while Hindi lost its natural flow and was reduced to a mere language of translation, mainly from English. Among sensitive sections of the Hindi intelligentsia, there has been an acute awareness of this predicament in recent years.

The other bilingualism—the imperative of living in two psychical realms in perennial conflict—is however, the more general condition. Unlike the Hindi–Urdu bilingualism, where community identities are collapsed into linguistic identities and conflict is externalised, this condition entails a life of conflict within. More importantly, it entails the disempowerment of the large mass of vernacular-speaking people to whom the inaccessibility of the language appears in the form of a denial of the world of privilege and power. And when that language brings with it a whole new paraphernalia of statecraft and judicial administration that is entirely unintelligible to the ordinary folk, it multiplies that sense of disempowerment manifold. It is as if suddenly, the native population is confronted with a whole new set of institutions and ways of doing things, subjected to a different regime of answerability to the state that they can no longer afford to ignore. This regime is not merely a stranger that speaks a different language, its language is imposed upon them and they must submit to it even if they can never understand why. The question of epistemic violence then is not merely a question of a conflict between a Locke or a Manu: it no longer remains a question of a conflict within the elites. The idea of epistemic violence directs our attention to the fact that the ways in which ordinary folk make sense of their world, within their moral universe, is seriously ruptured through the introduction of entirely different criteria.

Finally, as an aside, the simplistic idea that the advent of colonialism introduced a rule of law based on equality needs to be taken with a pinch of salt. Introduce it did, but its interventions in Indian society were not always based on supposed legal-moral considerations but on those of power. So it not only introduced differences where none existed, it also intervened to actively thwart nationalist attempts to overcome them where they did exist. For instance, the historian Biswamoy Pati notes in his work on Orissa, the British government intervened to prevent the annual Gandhian 'common dinner' where the upper castes under Congress influence would dine with the untouchables—an act worth welcoming from the liberal standpoint of the equality of human beings.

All appeals to the lost glory of the pristine 'Indian nationhood' are linked in the public mind to 'the fall' that was colonisation. There is therefore a continuing xenophobia that goes with it which is constantly fanned by the resurgent Right. If history is the arena of struggles in contemporary India, this struggle cannot be accomplished without making an adequate critique of the legacy of colonial modernity and the epistemic violence entailed in it.

Note

1. I borrow this term from Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak.

Aditya Nigam works at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi. He is also a freelance journalist and has been involved with labour issues in Delhi for the last two decades.

Illustrations: **Rustam Vania**

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Shiva Nataraja

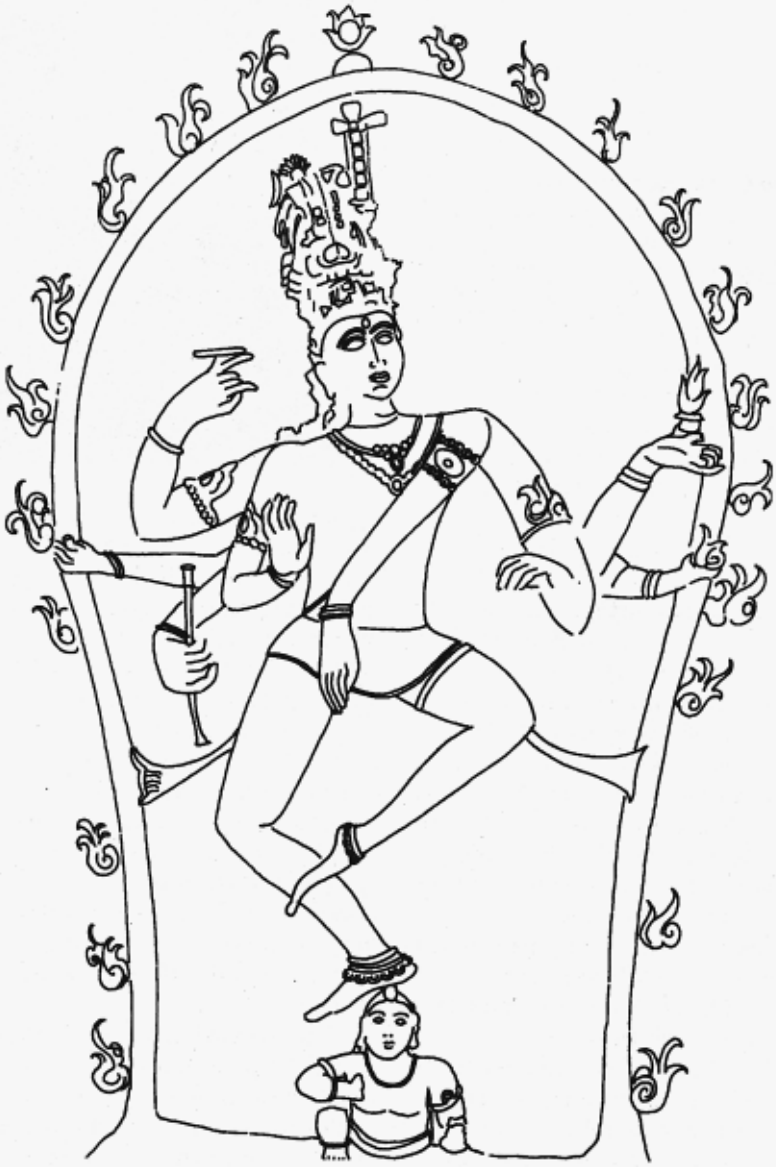
PRABHAKAR BEGDE

Illustration: **Indrani Sen**

According to the *Natyasastra*, on one occasion, Shiva started performing the *tandava* at Brahma's insistance. The term *tandava* is applied to the vigorous aspect of dance, usually performed by a male dancer. According to legend, it was first danced by the victorious Shiva at Chidambaram over the slain body of the demon, Mauyalka. According to another, when he danced in grief for the immolated Sati, the sweat from his body fell on the earth and caused grains of rice (*tandava*) to sprout from the ground and hence its name. Yet another story attributes the origin of the term to Tandu, Shiva's drummer, who improvised the music for his dance.

'Nataraja'—King of Dance, Shiva is a cosmic dancer whose dancing ground is the universe. He holds a small drum (*damaru*) in his upper right hand to beat out the rhythm of the unfolding universe. This sound is associated with 'space' (considered the first of five elements in India) from which all other elements unfold. His lower right hand shows the fear-negating gesture (*abhaya*), his upper left hand is in half-moon pose (*ardhachandramudra*) supporting a tongue of flame which signifies fire(*agni*) that finally destroys the world and is then quenched in cosmic waters. So the hand holding the drum and the one holding fire balance the interplay of creation and destruction. The second left arm is held gracefully across the chest (*gajahastamudra*) with the hand pointing to the uplifted foot, denoting favour or grace for the devotee. One foot rests on Apasmara or Mauyalka, the embodiment of man's abysmal cruelty and ignorance, conquest of which brings attainment of true wisdom.

Surrounding Shiva's figure and emanting from him is a large aureole of flames (*prabhamandala*) representing the vital processes of nature, sustained by the tremendous energy of the dancing God within. The flames represent the transcendental power of wisdom and truth, as well as the mantra 'Om' which signifies the totality of creation.



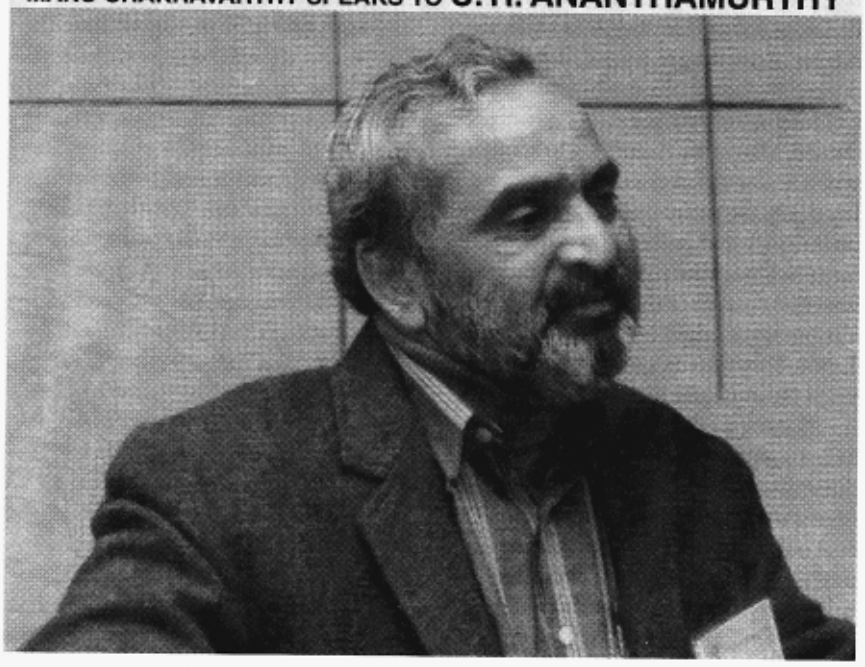
Shiva Nataraja
Chola, 12th century AD
Nallur, Tamil Nadu

The Changing face of Violence

A LOOK AT INDIAN SOCIETY

MANU CHAKRAVARTHY SPEAKS TO **U. R. ANANTHAMURTHY**

The various dimensions of politics, society, tradition, culture, language, consumerism, women and spirituality are examined by U. R. Ananthamurthy, eminent literateur and Jnanpith Award winner, in the context of societal violence in India. In this conversation with Manu Chakravarthy, he emphasises the need for spiritual reform and decentralisation if change is to take place in our world today.



Courtesy: Sahitya Akademi

Manu Chakravarthy: Before we actually turn to physical manifestations of violence, I would like you to tell us how you understand violence or conflict in philosophical terms as a creative writer. I am interested in raising this problem for the simple reason that a great writer like Joseph Conrad abhorred violence in deep philosophical terms. He tended to see it as a transgression and anarchy of the human spirit of the most hideous kind. What is your own position as a creative writer in relation to violence and conflicts?

U. R. Ananthamurthy: I am essentially with Conrad. But there is a difference. Conrad had a safe position. He had a well-tested frame of reference that came from his experience with the merchant navy. For him, a conservative order was essential. Discipline was a great virtue for Conrad. But he, too, was deeply attracted to violence. As a creative writer of a very high order, he was deeply fascinated by the opposite of what he valued. Conrad knew that nothing would remain the same forever. He knew that even order would change in its essential features over a period of time. Order rots after a while and therefore, has to find new dimensions.

Great literature has always preoccupied itself with this question at all points of time. It just occurred to me that in our ancient texts, the names of gods and goddesses signify the act of slaying a *rakshasa* or an evil doer for the sake of order. The entire conception of gods and goddesses has an underlying understanding of the principles of balance and order.

I realise now that human society itself at all stages has created a metaphysical enemy to justify violence. All ideologies have created a metaphysical enemy to endorse violence. When I say this I also have in mind revolutionaries like Lenin and Mao. All forms of society have found it necessary to vindicate violence for the sake of social order. I think Tolstoy understood this problem very well. The great Christian saints understood this for they had to fight evil forces.

A great creative writer would never simplify this phenomenon as many others might tend to. There is always a tension in creative writing of a high level, between the values of order and the forces of violence and anarchy. I work in the same tradition as a creative writer.

MC: Going beyond this philosophical dimension, let us now turn to the physical form of violence on the part of the subjugated and the oppressed whose very existence depends on their ability to withstand massive onslaughts on them by the whole society. Violence becomes inevitable for them. The fact that they have to resort to violence for survival is the basic cruelty imposed on them by civic society. How do we deal with this phenomenon?

URA: I agree with this. The ruling class oppresses the rest of the people with the impression that only they are human and the rest are not. You cannot grant human status to a person and then repress that person. The ruling class can continue to inflict violence on the oppressed only by

Courtesy: ABC

The modern system is a different matter altogether. It operates, quite often, without an actual 'face'. And, most dangerously, the kind of violence it addresses may not appear violent at all.

denying them that human status. But, surprisingly, the oppressed do not retaliate in the same manner. Paradoxically, the de-humanised oppressed recognises the oppressor as a human being all the same. This is something strange and wonderful. That is why the oppressed always say, 'Why do you oppress me when *both* of us are human?'

You see we do not question the tiger's wrath, we question oppression only when it takes place between human beings. There is something metaphysical in the retaliation of the oppressed people, for they do so going by their belief that the oppressor, all said and done, is still human and can be changed. If this faith does not exist, the oppressed will have to identify the oppressor as a monster and destroy him.

I would go to the extent of saying that true rebellion has to have love and compassion as its framework. Oppressed people may describe the oppressor as a monster. But that is perhaps rhetoric. Deep down, there is still a feeling that the oppressor is a human being after all. This has been true for all great rebellions in human history. Only such rebellions have augmented human feeling. In the process of achieving this, there might have been spontaneous violence which, of course, is different from deliberate violence. Many revolutions have failed simply because, eventually, the oppressed became the oppressor. Such revolutions have had disastrous effects. We must never lose sight of this.

MC: What distinctions would you draw between traditional violence and modern violence in the context of individual and social life? I raise this question to posit the view that traditional violence was local and personal, whereas modern violence is global and impersonal. One cannot even identify the oppressors in modern systems while such an entity could be identified as a human being in the traditional setup. How would you respond to this?

URA: We can make distinctions, but victims of violence in either case would not, for both systems torture them. However, modern violence is more pernicious in that it destroys all our life-systems, not excluding the environment. It does not spare our earth itself—what I mean is, it carries in its very scheme, an inevitable destructive quality that includes everything.

Traditional systems operate more subtly. They kill individual creativity, control individual potential and are at their worst in the matter of women. It can ruin all forms of individuality. But the modern system is a different matter altogether. It operates, quite often, without an actual 'face'. And, most dangerously, the kind of violence it addresses may not appear violent at all.

For instance, an urbanised, literate community may make a whole tribal community appear stupid and dumb by administering a test of intelligence, going by its own notion of what is called IQ. The logic, thinking and reasoning that is seen as central by a literate community, may mean nothing to a tribal community which would never be able to come to terms with such things. To recognise this as stupidity and go about 'educating, reforming and training' the tribal, is the worst form of violence of modernity. We have been witness to this phenomenon for a long time now. How do we fight a violence of this kind that is not physical and illegal, and is, most unfortunately, even unrecognisable? What methods do we have to check this disaster? This is modernity's most terrible aspect. You could fight the older form of violence, but you cannot fight this.

MC: All this is what we could possibly characterise as 'external and collective' form of violence. However, there is a form of violence that one might categorise as 'internal, domestic and cultural'. I mean the expectations of a family within a certain culture and the 'values' they endorse and impose on individuals in the name of morality and social order—those that ultimately destroy individual aspirations and choices. In a country like India, this is most true for our young girls and women who are 'defined' for life by society in

relation to almost everything, beginning with marriage to motherhood. Such a 'structural value' negates all individual choices. The force that operates here is far more destructive than what we have been discussing so far. The worst part is that it operates in such a manner that even those who yield to it are quite often unconscious of it. How do we reckon with this?

URA: This has always been an enormous problem and has always existed. Our modes of production have contributed enormously to this phenomenon. In an agrarian community there were such problems, but they had more to do with the body, with the physical aspect of life. Today, these problems have become intellectual problems, causing a lot of mental anguish and emotional stress to individuals, especially young girls who wish to lead very different lives. The pressures they have to face are very exhausting. Unfortunately, these pressures begin from the family fold and, as you have rightly pointed out, mostly in relation to the question of marriage, which must be settled wholly by oneself. There should not be force of any kind as far as this basic choice is concerned. The plight of our women is very bad. In a highly competitive society such as ours, the forms of violence and modes of suffering are innumerable. I have a feeling that this form of violence, so far confined to the domestic world, will one day come out on the streets. The frustration will certainly express itself, as it already has, in the form of mental illnesses in society.

Nothing remains very private today. The private world has been invaded by the public, which unleashes all kinds of expectations on the individual. The consumerist world has certainly destroyed the privacy of the individual and the domestic order. This is the most treacherous aspect of modern capitalism, which redefines everything for us in unilateral terms. This tie-up of the emerging new global order and old world tyrannical values is very inimical to individual sanctity and peace. And the modern nation state makes matters worse for all concerned.

MC: Moving into the political sphere, what kind of opposition do you visualise to the nation-state that centralises everything in the name of solidarity and national integration? Beyond the spiritual position of Gandhi that you have always upheld, can one envisage an alternative to the hegemonising modern nation-state in cultural terms? I raise this question because our cultural centres have blended well with our decadent political systems. They have, in fact, become centres of communalism. So what cultural alternatives do the people really have, when the very culture of our civil society has become communal and degenerate?

URA: Right now there appears to be no living, healthy culture anywhere. India must be one of the most violent places in the world today. The utter poverty and deprivation throughout the country is abysmal. I do not think this was so about 200 years ago. The transition from a feudal state to a semi-feudal state, and then to a vulgar market system has contributed tremendously to the decadence of our culture. I cannot see our dance forms like Yakshagana, for that matter, compensating these ugly forms of globalisation. Even our traditional courtesies have disappeared. I am very deeply disturbed by this.

In addition to this, violence against women, communal violence, and the general apathy towards things beautiful are terrifying. I believe we must recover the power of persuasion. The belief that people can be changed and reformed must not be allowed to die despite all these forms of violence. I believe in the spirit of language.

I wonder if we are today, eventually moving towards violence having lost our faith in the language of persuasion. This is why the language of conversion through sweet persuasion must be kept alive. There is no hope for us without this. We must not give up easily. We must still believe that the oppressor, after all, is a human being who can be reformed. This is what the environmentalists and feminists are trying to do in my opinion.

MC: You talk of decentralisation as a political and cultural alternative. Decentralisation is alright in conceptual terms. But how does one accept the notion of decentralisation in political terms which could mean conceding to the demands of several groups who are fighting for separation from the mainland? Their claims, which seem quite legitimate to me, would certainly lead to giving up the notion of a single, united nation. India would not exist as a single nation then. Would you agree with me if I regarded it as a just and natural solution to the problems of excessive centralisation imposed on us by the modern nation-state?

URA: There is no perfect answer to this question and these problems. I can only say that we must give up the 'modern' dream of development and progress. We must change our concept of happiness. And the idea of single nation will have to be given up, I think. India never existed as single nation in the past. So what's wrong with a kind of decentralisation that might mean giving up the idea of single nation? But before this happens in political terms, we must attempt to decentralise in spiritual terms by giving up greed and ambition. We must attempt to find a spiritual solution before turning to a political solution.

Courtesy: *Voices*, Vol.1 No.1

Professor U. R. Ananthamurthy is a multifaceted personality respected all over the world as an educationist, philosopher and writer. Born in Karnataka, he studied at the universities of Mysore and Birmingham. A prolific writer, some of his better known novels are *Samskara*, *Bharatipura*, *Avasthe* and *Bhava*. For his literary excellence, he was given the Jnanpith Award in 1994. Professor Ananthamurthy has a long career in education. He taught at Mysore University and was Vice-Chancellor, Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam. He is Visiting Professor at University of Iowa, and Tufts University, Masachussets, USA. He was Chairman, National Book Trust and is presently Chairman, Central Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi. He has just been awarded the Padma Bhushan by the Government of India.

Dr. Manu Chakravarty is Senior Lecturer in English at the NMKRV College, Jayanagar, Bangalore. He has edited a book on feminism and is a frequent contributor to leading literary newspapers and journals.

EDUCATING THE NATIONAL IMAGINATION

THE HEGEMONIC VIOLENCE OF CONTEMPORARY POLICIES AND TEXTBOOKS

SHALINI ADVANI

Priya M. Kathare

This article seeks to examine the construction of nation by our education system as reflected in the intentions and visions of policy makers and in the nature and structure of ideas embedded in textbooks. By analysing the various contradictory and complementary discourses that inhabit the curriculum, the essay notes the processes of essentialisation, mythification and romanticism of Indian history, society and economy which denies interrogation by alternative paradigms of development. This is an extract from a larger essay.

In the beginning
we will rewrite
de history books
Put William (de Conqueror)
on de back page
Make Morgan (de Pirate)
A footnote

We
Will recall with pride
Our own.
Grannies to come
Will know
Of de Arctic Ocean
But will know more
of de Caribbean sea
of the Atlantic Ocean.[1]

It is a truism today, that the structuring of knowledge is an exercise which is intimately linked to the structuring of power. In a colonised nation, this is played out on the political and economic terrain of the coloniser, but post-colonial nations seek to redefine and re-invent themselves via alternative definitions of what is worth knowing. In India, the project of nation building has lain at the heart of the education policy since 1947. It has been however an uneasy and contestatory process. Between the conflicting claims of the English speaking intelligentsia and the proponents of Hindi, the secularists and the revisionist BJP governments of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, the urban middle class and the newly powerful rural elite, education has been the site of multiple definitions of the nation as various claimants to power have attempted to lay their imprint upon it.

What is the nature of the nation which emerges and who defines it? The question of defining the nation is more complex than is at first evident. For the nation, like any idea, is imagined into existence in different ways for different reasons at different times; it is not an objective entity which transcends time nor is it fixed in its nature.

The most powerful single element emerges because of the bureaucratic structure of post-colonial India. This has meant that at least overtly, the definition of the nation is overwhelmingly dictated by the imperatives of state policy. A number of recent studies have highlighted the hegemonic nature of state-controlled education which have defined the state as essentially middle class and overwhelmingly powerful. The multi-sided

struggle among various status communities for domination, for economic advantage and for prestige is played out on the terrain of education.

There are two distinct if connected ways in which the education system seeks to construct the nation. One is through a conceptual definition and the constitution of a national-cultural imagery which locates the nation in the realm of loyalty, emotion and myth. The second is through a description of the nation in motion, its activity, social ordering and progress defining its parameters. In this essay, I examine this process by considering first, the intentions and visions of policy makers and second, the nature and structure of ideas embedded in government textbooks.

To explore the articulations of state policy on education as well as its implementation in textbooks is to uncover a variety of discourses. On the one hand, there is the inevitable emphasis on defining and celebrating the nationhood; on the other, the silences and assertions reveal a profound unease with potential challenges to this over-arching definition, an attempt to negotiate the conflicts.

This is evident in nearly every education report commissioned since 1947. Overwhelmingly, education is seen as the holy grail, the crucial element in shaping national culture. As early as 1952, this is spelt out in the Mudaliar commission report on secondary education:

The aim of secondary education is to train the youth of the country to be good citizens who will be competent to play their part effectively in the social reconstruction and economic development of their country.[2]

It is interesting to note that the notion of the nation in this report as well as elsewhere within the system is that of a single and an undifferentiated entity. The Mudaliar commission report sets the tone for the next four decades: it sees the nation as a monolithic and unitary whole and is reluctant to conceive of an entity which is made up of fragmentary and diverse elements. In fact, the conflicting and contesting identities which inevitably exist are generally seen as divisive and dangerous:

The education system constructs the nation through a national-cultural imagery based on loyalty, emotion and myth.

There has been an accentuation in recent years of certain undesirable tendencies of provincialism, regionalism and other sectional differences ... it is as much the duty of the statesmen as educationists to take steps to re-orient people's minds in the right direction. If education fails to play its part effectively in checking these tendencies, if it does not strengthen the forces of national cohesion and solidarity, we are afraid that our freedom, our national unity as well as our future progress will be seriously imperiled.[3]

It is worth quoting this in some detail because it strikes a note which resounds till the present day. The anxiety for a strongly centralised identity is comprehensible in a newly fledged nation, five years after the partition. It is, however, echoed with equal vehemence, over three decades later in the 1986 National Policy for Education (the New Education Policy, as it is popularly termed), suggesting that years later, the anxiety to define a coherent and unified nation remains equally compelling. While stressing the need for education to teach the values of secularism and tolerance, the policy recommends a national system of education with a core curriculum including the history of India's freedom movement, constitutional obligations and 'other content essential to nurture national identity'. There is a clear conception of a flat national identity which it is possible to develop through a specific national culture which can be taught.

The nationally integrative aim of education is faithfully transmitted from policy to implementation. In 1984, the NCERT embarked on an exercise to put together a national curricular framework. The document entitled, *National Curriculum for Elementary and Secondary Education: A Framework*, was the result of the deliberations of an NCERT steering group, one national and four regional seminars. The final policy that emerged gave enormous weight to the role of education in 'strengthening national identity and unity'.

The document is significant because it provides a framework for the curriculum as it is implemented on the ground, going beyond a broad definition of general policy. It states:

At this point of our history, the most urgent need is to consciously develop national spirit and national identity.

Education, as an instrument of social transformation, should ensure that its beneficiaries and products demonstrate a national consciousness, a national spirit and national identity which are considered essential for national unity.[4]

Apart from the tautology ('national' and its variants occur six times in two sentences), ... it provides a framework for the curriculum ... going beyond a broad definition of general policy. Its aims are consistently visible in the construction of textbooks.

The anxiety for a strongly centralised identity is comprehensible in a newly fledged nation, five years after the partition. It is, however, echoed with equal vehemence, over three decades.

Unity in Diversity

One of the strongest markers of post-colonial Indian identity is an apparently overt recognition of its cultural diversity and regional variance. The theme, however, is simultaneously emphasised and uneasily subverted. For all their emphasis on national unity, every education report since independence also contains a section on opening up the minds of students to the variety and richness of India's cultural heritage. In attempting to conceive of a nation which defines itself by its cultural variance, the textbooks clearly intend to give space to multitude of voices. Cultural nationalism, a concept with which these books flirt, sees the essence of a nation in its distinctive civilisation, demanding that the natural divisions within the nation—occupational, religious and regional—be respected in the belief that the impulse to differentiate is the dynamo of national creativity. In a country with such huge variation in regional, religious and social culture it seems like a sensible inspiration for defining the nation.

And yet ultimately, these textbooks do not carry it through. They fail to impart a lived sense of cultural variation and difference, because of a fundamental and misrecognised discomfort with the very notion of a federated and diverse nation. The contradictory notions of what it is that constitutes India, are markers of a profound unease: post-colonial differentiated identity battles with the underpinnings of a unitarian colonial and western definition which traditionally sees the nation as a monolingual and homogeneous culture. Thus, although at one level there is an acknowledgement and even a celebration of cultural diversity, there is a contradictory impetus to obscure and marginalise this difference.

Thus, regional and cultural variation is restricted to its external and most obvious manifestation. There is no attempt to create an awareness of cultural difference other than that which is reflected in skin colour and names. What is never represented are the signs and practices which give meaning and reality to cultural differentiation. Culture is visible in a system of symbols and for it to be communicated, what is required is detail, the thick description which enables it to be understood and shared by students.

The confusion between a valorisation of both difference and sameness is largely located in colonial and orientalist assumptions. Orientalism sets the framework by which nationalism defines itself—national as opposed to regional, as a concrete and unmixed identity. Underlying the need to celebrate diversity, there lurks a concept of a nation as possessing a homogeneous culture which shares common intellectual ground with a nationalist search for continuity and an uniform cultural identity. In many ways therefore, the confused message of textbooks arises from a profound anxiety about the inability to define the nation, if it is not spelt out in specifically homogeneous and unitarian terms.

The Symbol as the Nation

As Eric Hobsbawm argues, conceptions of the nation, nationalism and nation states rest on exercises in social engineering: modern nations 'invent' tradition to locate themselves in a community so 'natural' as to require no definition other than self-assertion. This assertion of self is played out on the site of visible symbols of the nation: popular monuments, buildings and statuary. School textbooks, since they cannot bring these into the classroom, do the next best thing—they describe them in carefully nationalistic terms. The point of each of these symbols, whether they are buildings or birds, is to universalise the nation into an entity which transcends regional distinction and time.

Mythifying the Nation

India is further elevated by collapsing the language of religion into a discourse of the nation. In the process, its entity is mythified, with an appeal which is altogether more powerful than that of territory. For instance, in the poem, *Mother India*, the nation is the divine goddess with 'Kanyakumari' as her holy feet.[5] Similarly, in the poem, *My Land*, to fight for the motherland has the resonance of a holy war.

No men than hers are braver/ her women's hearts never waver/I'd freely die to save her/ And think my lot divine.[6]

Poetry is a singularly effective means of prompting such a celebration of the national sentiment: the strong metre and rhyme create arousing and emotive appeal which is both irresistible and uncritical. A transcendent appeal, moreover, transposes the nation to a realm outside that of ordinary existence; implicitly not only is such a nation constructed as a powerfully unified entity, it is also outside the arena of moral critique.

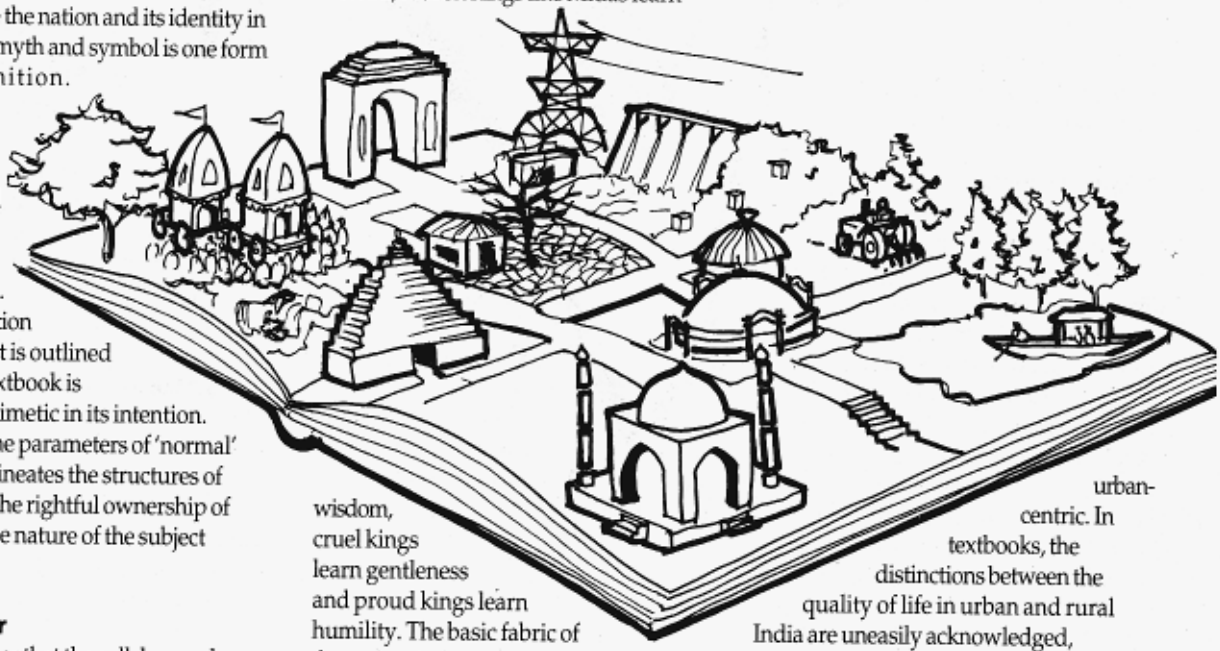
To locate the nation and its identity in the realm of myth and symbol is one form of definition. Another is to construct its people, its economy and its daily life in specific ways. The organisation of society as it is outlined in a school textbook is essentially mimetic in its intention. Suggesting the parameters of 'normal' society, it delineates the structures of social order, the rightful ownership of power and the nature of the subject population.

Social Order

If we remember that the syllabus and textbooks are a reflection of the society in which they function, it is not unexpected to find that the ideology of bourgeois society runs through all texts, emphasising social order at all costs. All rulers, whether kings of the past or the officials of the modern state, are constructed as benign, sympathetic and exalted—the power stratification of society seems inevitable and natural.

An overwhelming number of lessons being set in the past, the king and queen are recurring signifiers of a benign exercise of absolute power. Underlying the narrative is an ideology which celebrates this absolute power as the only reliable dispenser of justice. It is in fact, neither a coincidence nor an unthinking celebration of a bygone romantic age which sets so many stories in the past. The locus of power and authority in the past residing clearly and visibly in the king, it is a simple matter to demonstrate the disbursement of justice through the active intervention and verdict of the king: certainly easier to track it through the tortuous and more diffuse corridors of contemporary government departments. In the process, it makes acceptable and even desirable, the exercise of an all-powerful state authority. Even in stories which seem to interrogate notions of perfect rulers, existing structures of social order are reinforced in subtle ways. The inadequate kings are never dispossessed or deposed. Instead, foolish kings like Midas learn wisdom, cruel kings learn gentleness and proud kings learn humility. The basic fabric of the society is thus never questioned or restructured.

Textbooks do not carry it through. They fail to impart a lived sense of cultural variation and difference, because of a fundamental and misrecognised discomfort with the very notion of a federated and diverse nation.



Rural and Urban India: Modernity and Timelessness

The inscription of geographical space in these books strongly reflects a specific construction of the social imagery. We see an India which is modern, technologically advanced and industrialised, but also one which is substantially rural. The rural world with its connotations of timeless and transcendental wisdom is valorised, but as we shall see, the picture is strangely unreal, the gaze strongly urban even when it is most celebratory.

Discernable beneath the celebration, is an anxious acknowledgement of the uneven spread of modernity. The country is consistently described in opposition and relation to the city. It is an 'othering' gaze with the dominant vision remaining urban-centric. In textbooks, the distinctions between the quality of life in urban and rural India are uneasily acknowledged, attempting resolution by positing rural life as superior to urban existence. This construction of the rural ideal serves to legitimise the partial modernisation of India: the bucolic world is posited as a manifestation of the uniqueness of India, one in which tradition and modernity march hand-in-hand. It is, in fact, this simultaneity which seeks to define the nation and the tension between the two worlds becomes a means of claiming a special place in the world order.

Juxtaposed to the idealisation of rural India, therefore, there is concurrent celebration of the march of modern progress. In fact, the essential joy of rural existence is asserted even when there is a partial acknowledgement of hardship. In fact, there is a carefully asserted suggestion that villages too, share in the march of modernity. Textbooks which view modernity as the only paradigm of

development also inevitably construct a nation's evolution in terms of a post-facto justification of state economic policy. It is revealing that the site of backwardness and underdevelopment is automatically and invariably located in rural India. In contrast to this we are assured that: 'No visitor to our country leaves without seeing and admiring at least a few of the dams we have built. Thanks to the Five Year Plans, there are big steel plants and factories for manufacturing railway carriages'.

For all their focus on rural India, therefore, the textbooks speak from an essentially external position. Ironically, in the anxiety to smooth over any possible perceptions of rural disadvantage, the text does not interrogate the basic assumption that shops, cinema halls and electricity are in themselves signifiers of contentment.

Progress and development is narrowly conceived of; restricted solely to roads and lights, it offers no alternative pattern of rural development which suggests a paradigm of modernity which is distinct from industrialisation or access to a commodity culture. There is therefore a profound chasm between rural and urban India: when it is celebrated, the village is transcendental in its beauty and timelessness; on the other hand its location in the present is a discourse upon the transformation of backwardness through modernisation. The dichotomy is an unacknowledged affirmation of and anxiety about the loss of the rural within the cultural universe of the increasingly hegemonic urban.

The problems is that such a portrayal suggests a single paradigm of modernity, so that the march of urban industrialisation is seen as an unproblematic virtue. It promotes an ideology which structures technological progress as the defining mark of a self-respecting nation. For instance, the devastating demographic shift towards urban migration is treated unproblematically and is even celebrated as a mark of progress: 'Many families are rapidly moving to cities and towns in order to find jobs in factories and industries'. The stunning blindness of such a statement creates a world in which the problems of land dispossession, the crippling effects of a failed monsoons or the debilitation of migrant workers do not exist.

With this treatment of the subject of technological development, the child reading these texts fails to see the costs of this modernity: social, cultural, or ecological. A celebration of this inferiorises alternative modes of development, alternative priorities. In the process, textbooks wilfully blind the middle-class students to whom they address themselves. The beneficiaries of the miracle of modernity and capitalist progress know nothing of its price: the dispossessed peasants, the children who labour in factories and the poor who have no access to open markets thrown open to international capital. The victims of these systems become forever the unknowable 'other' of modern India, forgotten because they remain hidden from the view of those with the knowledge and power to effect change.

Nandkumar Vishwanath Jethe

Conclusion

If we argue that the construction of the nation in these textbooks is a deliberate exercise in ideological structuring, we need to address ourselves to the question of whose and which ideology is reflected. It seems superfluous to say that these textbooks function as reflections of the dominant state policy: the more interesting questions are of how this is established and whose state is ultimately reflected in the process.

The incorporation of diverse voices only serves to strengthen the dominant, rather than weaken it. The acknowledgement of the presence of different social groups does not bring the student any closer to the reality they inhabit, only deepening the gulf between the dominant and the subject worlds. Through the process of essentialisation, mythification and romanticisation, they make strange the very categories which they appear to celebrate. There is no serious subversion or even interrogation by alternative paradigms set by religious minorities, Dalits or even by questions of gender. The fact that these textbooks are produced by state education councils specifically set up to do away with the most blatant forms of caste and religious underpinning does not alter the privileging and problematic nature of their ideology.

Courtesy: ***Economic and Political Weekly***

Notes

1. 'The Lesson' by the Grenadian poetess, Merle Collins in her anthology *Because the Dawn Breaks* (Karia Press, 1985).
2. *Report of the Secondary Education Commission, 1952–53* (Ministry of Education and Social Welfare, Government of India), New Delhi, 1972, p.5
3. Ibid., p.6
4. *National Curriculum for Elementary and Secondary Education: A Framework*, NCERT, New Delhi, 1988, p.5
5. *Read for Pleasure*, Book II, NCERT, New Delhi, 1980, p.76
6. *English Reader*, Book IV, NCERT, New Delhi, 1993, p.117

Shalini Advani is a school administrator and teacher. She is currently working on the politics of identity in school textbooks. She has written in newspapers and journals on educational ideology, state policy and teacher training.

Illustrations: **Amit Mathur**

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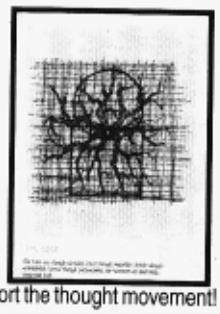

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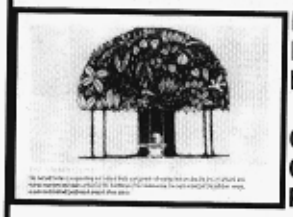

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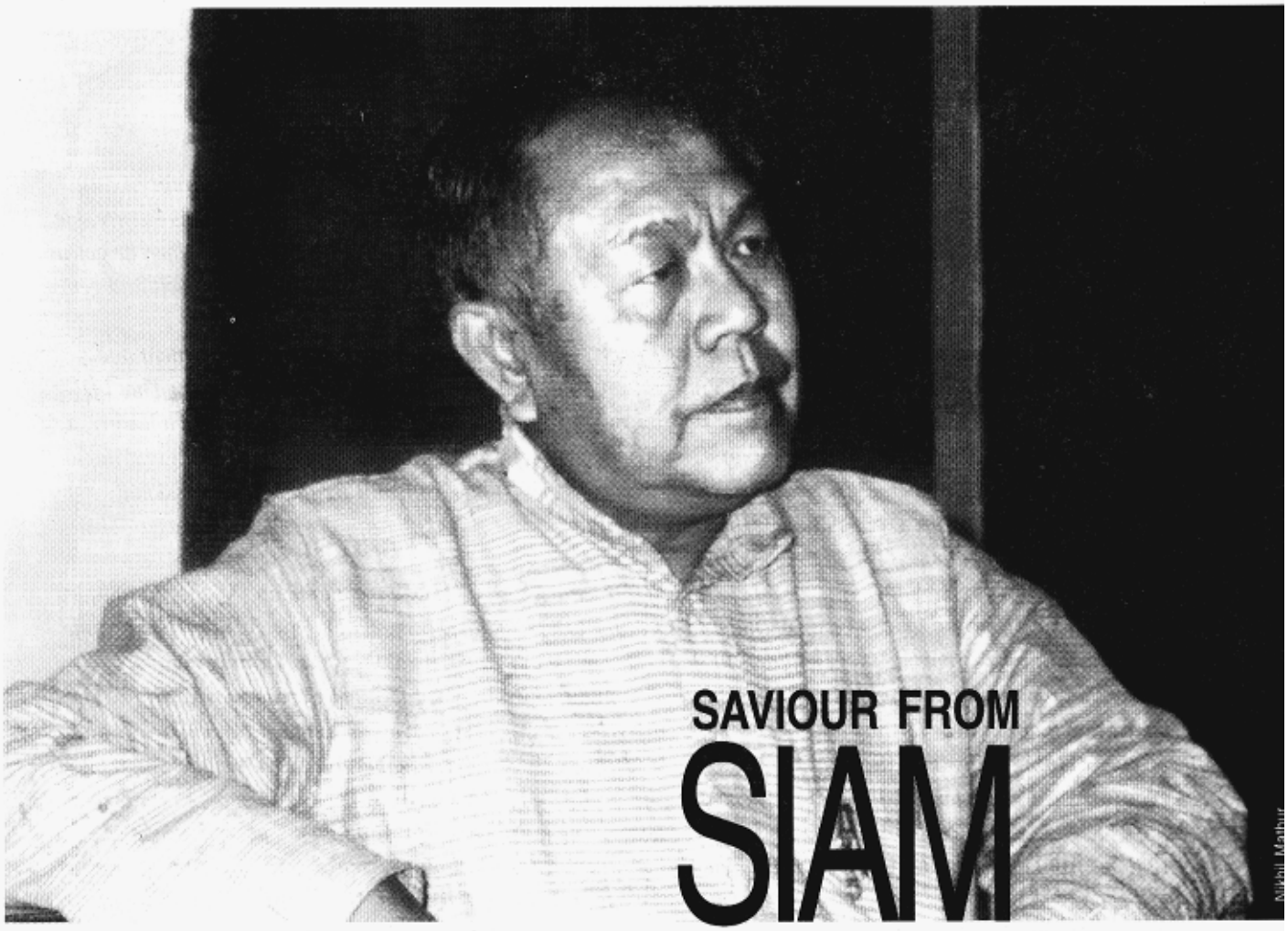


Nikhil Mathur

SAVIOUR FROM SIAM

SULAK SIVARAKSA

IN CONVERSATION WITH RUKMINI SEKHAR

The jury acclaims Sulak 'for his vision, activism and spiritual commitment in the quest for a development process that is rooted in democracy, justice and cultural integrity'.

Sulak's significant contribution has been to invert the authoritarian-dominated meaning of being Thai and being Buddhist from that of being against change to its true and original form. He legitimised people outside the circle of power who are fighting for liberty and who are accumulating wisdom to fight against authoritarianism as being truly Thai, truly Buddhist. He called into question the authoritarians' use of the meaning of being Thai and being Buddhist as being 'against change'.

From citation of the 1995 Right Livelihood Award.

Ask me who is shaping the course of history and I will tell you that it is the ordinary man in the street.

Sulak Sivaraksa

The first thing that struck me about the man on the dais was that here was someone who screamed courage and boldness. I had heard about the fiery social critic and activist from Siam and had gone to listen to his lecture. He was a smallish man, wearing loose blue trousers and a khadi kurta with the ease of an old India-hand. When he got up to speak, his words were at once biting as he lashed out against hegemonic patterns of development and soft and gentle as he emphasised on non-violence and compassion as the only way.

Tom Ginsburg, editor of Sivaraksa's book, ***Seeds of Peace*** *describes the man thus, 'Sulak is a prominent and outspoken Thai social critic and activist. He is the natural product of the contradictions of contemporary Thai life—educated abroad ... and his politics are at once culturally conservative and socially progressive. Sulak is a lawyer, a teacher, a scholar, a publisher, the founder of many organisations and the author of more than sixty books and monographs in both Thai and English. During the last three decades, he has been a constant irritant, a "professional gadfly" for Thai governments. University of California, anthropologist, Herbert Phillips describes Sulak as a "Thai institution, in a class by himself"'.*

When he returned to Siam after nine years of studying, teaching and working in England and Wales, he founded the ***Social Science Review****, which became Thailand's foremost intellectual magazine. During this time, he became deeply interested in grassroots development and in the 1970s, he became the central figure in a number of non-governmental organisations in Siam. In 1976, Siam experienced its bloodiest coup. Sulak's books were burnt and he was forced to remain in exile for two years. In 1984, he was arrested on charges of lese-majeste or criticising the king, after his book* ***Unmasking Thai Society*** *was published. After a wave of international protests he was released. He was again arrested in September 1991 for a talk he gave at Thammasat University on 'The Regression of Democracy in Siam'. He went into hiding and had to go into exile again. Sulak is a practising Buddhist and his critique of society flows from this. Says Ginsburg, 'He is among a handful of leaders worldwide working to revive the socially engaged aspects of Buddhism.' Right now he is busy developing two new initiatives. The first is an international network on Alternatives to Consumerism and second, the development of a new college in Thailand called Spirit in Education Movement. In 1995, he received the Right Livelihood Award.*

Sulak is convinced that real individual, familial, social and political change can only be brought about non-violently and in this he draws his deepest inspiration from the Buddha dharma and Mahatma Gandhi. We focused therefore on some issues on violence and non-violence.

Rukmini Sekhar: You have been recognised all over the world for fusing the metaphysics of Buddhism with hands on social activism. Why didn't you become a monk? Is it because it may have come in the way of your 'worldly' activism?

Sulak Sivaraksa: Indeed I was once a monk in my country. Most young people become monks once in their lives either for four months or four years. I was a monk for eighteen months when I was very young. But I didn't stay as one. You see, it was the time of the Second World War. I went to a Protestant and then to a Catholic school. When the War came, all schools were closed. They had to move out of Bangkok. I did not like school. My father asked me whether I would like to move out of Bangkok to a boarding school. I said, no. So he said, since you have been educated in Christian schools all your life, why don't you join the monkhood. So I did, and I really liked it and never wanted to leave! But my father begged me, saying that when I grew up, fell in love and wanted to get married and work in the world, then what would I do. Gradually, because of his pleas, I left the monkhood.

RS: But is it not true that many Buddhist abbots in South East Asia are involved in social activism? You don't feel that taking on the robes is an impediment?

SS: No, in Buddhism, a monk or a lay person has at least two roles to play: one to transform oneself from a violent to a non-violent person, to reduce greed and lust, and ultimately, to change ignorance to understanding and wisdom. This would then transform itself to a love which is not self-love. This is the first part of your training. The second part is how to relate meaningfully to others, not exploiting yourself or others. Others mean other human beings, animals, all sentient beings—trees, rivers and so on. Monks are sometimes more effective than lay people in some areas and vice versa.

I would add that people who claim to be rational, scientific and logical—intellectuals and technocrats—can and should learn from ordinary people, from the Buddha, from Gandhi, from various spiritual traditions, tribals and other indigenous societies. You can't help society without helping yourself—if you are angry, violent and impatient. So, you have to look after yourself if you have to look after others.

RS: But isn't it virtually impossible to negate violence altogether from our lives? Doesn't everything involve some form of violence: a mother giving birth to a child or a seed breaking from a pod? Metaphysically speaking, can you discount the

presence of creative tension? And isn't all tension violent? How do we then understand violence?

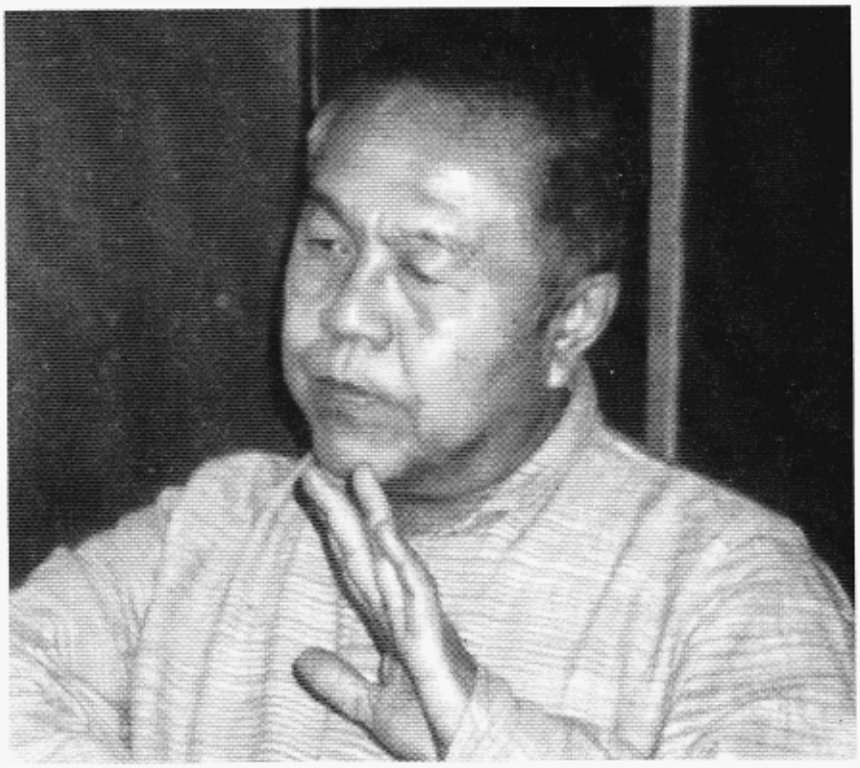
SS: This is perhaps a crucial issue. You see, the Jains exemplify this adherence to non-violence. They cover their mouths to prevent germs and other little creatures going in, some even eschew cloth. But then, going by that, we can't even take medicines to cure ourselves, because we would then be destroying some bacteria at the very least. Buddhism believes in the middle path. In Theravada Buddhism (different from Mahayana Buddhism), Buddhagosha, the great commentator from Sri Lanka states clearly, that only monks and nuns could come even close to a non-violent lifestyle. Most lay people, in one way or other, will be violent. We have to be aware of that. My good friend from America, Alan Watts, said that the reason for his being a vegetarian was because cows cry louder than cabbages. So all we can do is to avoid violence as much as possible. The Tibetan Buddhists are not even vegetarians as there is very little vegetation in Tibet. Us Thai people, we eat fish. You see, in Thailand, the very word for food is *khao pla*—rice and fish. Once you know that you have to commit violence, at least you know how to be less violent. But if you are not careful, you could also *claim* that you avoid violence. There is a difference between avoiding violence and being less violent. We don't kill but we let other people kill for us. We allow capital punishment, we allow conscriptions to the army and we allow nation states to spend so much money on arms. Can we absolve ourselves of responsibility?

RS: Are you vegetarian?

SS: No, I'm not, but if I have a choice, I would prefer to be a non-meat eater.

RS: So, what you are saying is that there ought to be no blanket statement in favour of vegetarianism; it depends on ecology, climatic conditions, local resources, customs, among other things.

SS: The strength and weakness of Buddhism is that it has no rigid dogma. It depends entirely on how you know yourself. The less you exploit yourself, the less you exploit others. If you are aware you know what to do. So 'mindfulness' is the key word in Buddhism.



Nikhil Mathur

RS: In your book, *Seeds of Peace* you write, 'Pacifism is at once a great strength as well as a great weakness of Buddhism as an organised religion'. Why is it a weakness? Does that mean you would like Buddhism to endorse a holy war, a just war, so long as it is mindfully conducted?

SS: I don't think any school of Buddhism subscribes to the 'just war' theory. Violence is violence. In the eyes of the Buddha it is all wrong. At least, in my tradition, the Pali tradition, the southern school of Buddhism, it is never right to be violent. But in the northern school of Buddhism, there is one text that was written much later. It had the following example. If I travel in a boat with you, and I know that you are a robber who is going to kill the rest of the passengers, then out of my compassion, I am allowed to kill you. Even so, I commit an act of violence, but in view of the fact that I might be saving the remaining five hundred passengers, perhaps it is my skillful means to kill you. But in the southern school, there is not even a single text to justify violence.

RS: But is human nature not a constant? Haven't we always been violent or tended to be so? Is man today any more violent than his predecessors, though we get the feeling that the pace and quality of modern violence is different from that of a more simple society. Can you comment on this?

SS: If human nature contains the components of violence, it also contains the components of non-violence. Violence in a very simple society probably comprises at most, the use of a stone, a stick or knife. Darwin has been misrepresented, especially in the way that it was put by Spencer—survival of the strongest. Hence competition. I don't think that's right. Competition means that you exploit yourself to begin with. When you work only to compete, you don't think properly. Something happens to their insides and they lose harmony within and without. I was talking the other day to some students at Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, and they said competition is the law, violence is the norm. But I say, collaboration is also the norm, non-violence is also the norm. This has to be stressed. Violence has certainly increased today because firstly, the mainstream media thrives on the transportation of violence. Not

Nikhil Mathur

surprisingly, the best profits are made from arms deals. The connection is clear once people are sold on violence, it is easy to push arms. Secondly, take a look at advertisements which fold you in a world of hallucinations. As regards violence, there are some who promote it on a large scale—people like Huntington, who, though old, are still taken seriously. He was the one who said to the American president, bomb all the villages of South Vietnam, so that they could drive the Viet-Cong into the city. Then, at that time, he said the communists were our enemy, now the Arabs. Once the 'enemy' idea takes root, violence is bound to increase. So departments of Foreign Affairs are created and today this is considered a very respectable field! So you see how the myth has been gradually created. People need to be aware of this so that they know how to confront it. For instance, we recently had a big gathering in my country to attend a meeting called *Alternatives to Consumerism* to address this whole issue of advertisements.

RS: I gather from what you say that technology and the market system are insecure and wants humanity to be violent, weak and exploitative in order for the market to survive?

SS: Precisely. The market can be useful and harmful, but technology is usually harmful. The more complicated technology becomes, the more harmful it is, because you can't comprehend it. Indeed, even our professions—the more complicated they are, the more harmful they become to us. That is why a lot of people spend their time fighting within big corporations and bureaucracies, because it has no meaning. From the Buddhist point of view, there is what is called Right Livelihood, i.e., one must understand what one is doing. A lot of the stuff we do has no meaning, it is all so compartmentalised.

RS: Do you subscribe to the view that there is a larger-than-life natural cycle at work? That everything goes full circle, plays itself out and balances itself? That we do not have to worry about micro procedures and trends whether of nature, proliferating violence or technology? Does this view ever colour your activism?

SS: Now, this kind of view could be useful or harmful. If you just sit and wait for violence to decrease, I don't think it will. The Buddha said that if you put fuel to the fire, the fire will only increase. The point is, that any kind of destruction that you see before you, in your lifetime, must be challenged, but challenged meaningfully and that means non-violently. Right now, in my country, there is a big gas pipeline coming from Burma. At first, we all thought, how wonderful, we'll get cheap gas, there's going to be a big industry. People were going to get rich. But when you give them the facts, they can see who is really going to get rich—the transnational corporations at the expense of the Burmese people who have been maimed, raped, dislocated and killed. Is this not violence in the name of technological advancement? If you cut trees, they don't grow back in a hundred years. It takes at least a few thousand. So you have to bring in awareness, non-violently, and then you can change things. Fritz Schumacher was sent to Burma by the British government when Burma had just become independent around the same time as India, to help them 'develop'. But Fritz was probably the only expert who said that they don't need to develop *our* way, it should be the other way round. Let me recount an instance that took place when Uno was the Prime Minister of Burma. Some experts reported that Burma was very rich in uranium and that if it was exploited, she would be the richest country in the world. Uno asked the expert, 'How long did it take the uranium to form'? 'Millions of years', said the experts. Uno remarked, 'Oh, then let it remain for a few thousand years more'. Now that is a non-violent approach. Violence is linked with greed and greed is linked to illusion. The five main precepts which Buddhism is against are all indirectly or directly linked to violence. Anger, greed, sexual misconduct, lies and intoxication. The ideas of the Vietnamese monk, Thich Nhat Hanh have been published in a beautiful book on the

five precepts called, *For the Future to be Possible*. Most Buddhists, whom I call capital 'B' Buddhists, deal with the five precepts in a very old fashioned way. It is not enough to just declare yourself free of these, in fact, it is too simplistic; the whole social structure is full of violence.

RS: Is not ideology violent too, I mean the violence of 'isms'?

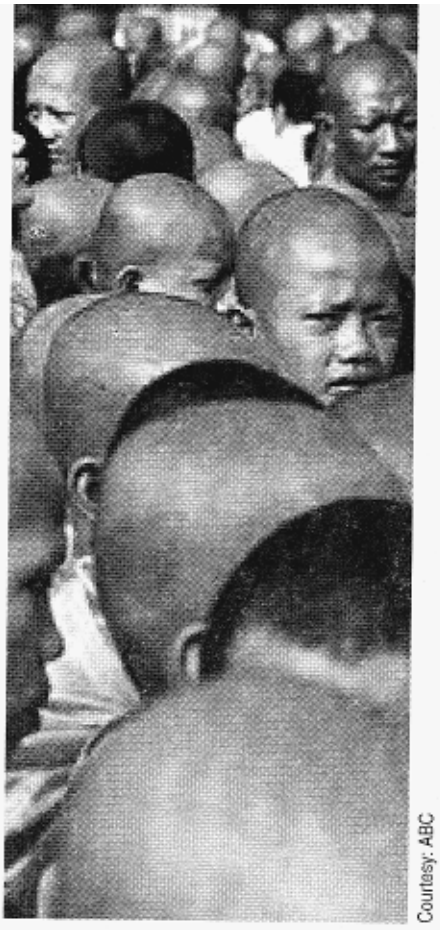
SS: Yes, most certainly. Any 'ism' for that matter, including Buddhism. The Buddha never used the word 'Buddhism'. It was coined in England. Once you hold the view that my 'ism' is better than yours, you are no longer natural. Any religion has two sides, one tribal and the other universal. Buddhism has a warring side to it too. That's why I sometimes talk about small 'b' buddhism—the Buddha dharma, because the teachings of the Buddha encourage you not to believe, but to listen, study and practice. If you blindly accept the five precepts, you are bound to go astray. It is a goody goody approach.

RS: Are the young people of Siam familiar with Gandhi? Are they curious about him?

SS: I would say more now, because of the efforts of Mr. Karuna Kushalasahi and his wife. He walked all the way from Siam in 1930, met Gandhiji and was deeply inspired by him. You see, for all of us, the Buddha is so far away, Gandhi is so much nearer. Mahakushananda is known as the Gandhi of Cambodia, and Thich Nhat Hanh as the same in Vietnam, though he is a Buddhist monk. Buddhist monks are traditionally good at social improvement at the village level but they are not very politically aware and this is where Gandhi's contribution is very important to us. I mean, you must understand politics, but not be involved in party politics. You must challenge politics which includes the international economic order.

RS: Do you ever use fasting as a protest tool? What do you think of fasting? The end may be non-violent, but would you say that the means may be violent?

SS: I don't use fasting for political ends, but I help people who fast. I fast regularly though, during our Buddhist lent. But for me that is training, just like I use training to control, say my anger. I also use fasting to impress the group of people I work with, that at least we have the *luxury* of fasting. Half the people in the world have to go without food. Naturally, when I fast, there is some violence, but that violence is gentle. And when you fast all the time it is non-violent, it can even be healthy.



Courtesy: ABC

This kingdom was known as Siam until 1939, when its name was changed to Thailand. Then it reverted to the original name again in 1946. Two years after the coup d'etat of 1947, it was decreed that the country would be called Thailand, and it remains so officially. Ironically, the kingdom has since been ruled by one dictator after another with very brief democratic intervals. The name, Thailand, signifies the crisis of traditional Siamese Buddhist values. By removing from the nation the name it had carried all its history, is in fact the first step in the psychic dehumanisation of its citizens, especially when its original name was replaced by a hybrid, anglicised word. This new name also implies chauvinism and irredentism.

RS: Talking of health, what do you make of modern medicine and systems of health? Do you reckon that it could have genetic and generational implications of violence?

SS: Let's face it—when we say 'modern medicine', we mean 'western medicine', which is unfortunately in the hands of a few rich drug companies whose sole motive is profit. Therefore, they are very powerful and almost have the entire medical profession under their control. In Thailand, they use all kinds of tactics to perpetuate this; they give free samples, promote and support seminars, etc. I was asked to be one of the judges of the People's Tribunal on the tenth anniversary of Bhopal. We passed judgement in the British Parliament that the present western hospitals and medicine were violent and harmful. If it served anybody, it only served the rich. On top of that, you now have medical technology which is prohibitively expensive. Do you not call it a violence on health? Why have we forsaken Chinese, Thai and Indian systems of medicine on which people have survived for thousands of years? And why do we want to be immortal and prolong death?

RS: You have been travelling all over the world and observing people. Because of global homogenising processes, the problems and issues faced by young people are also homegenised. What is your message to the youth of India?

SS: Mainstream educational institutions incorporate what I call a 'hidden curriculum' that denigrate the family and the community and which say that indigenous cultures are old fashioned. Therefore, they need to have *alternative* information to empower themselves in a balanced way. Lastly, young middle-class students must spend some time working with the poor, because they are so much more in touch with reality.

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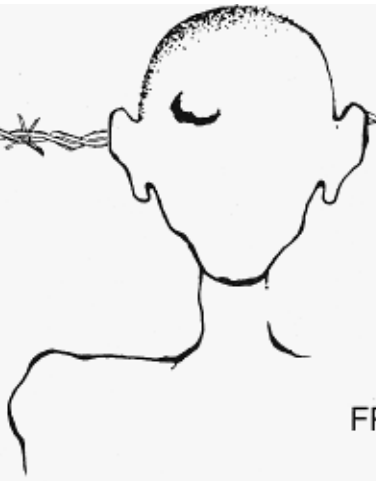


Poetry of War & Suffering

FROM THE NOT SO FIRST WORLD

SOUTH ASIA

SRI LANKA

Auschwitz from Colombo

Colombo.March.The city white fire
That pours through vehement trees burst into flames
And only a faint but searing wind
Stirring the dust
From relics of foreign invaders, thrown
On this far littoral by chance or greed,
Their stray memorial the odd word mispronounced,
A book of laws
A pile of stones
Or maybe some vile deed.
Once there was another city; but there
It was cold—the tree leafless
And already thin ice on the lake.
It was that winter
Snow hard upon the early morning street
And frost flowers carved in hostile window panes

It was that winter.

Yet only yesterday
Half a world and twenty-five years later
I learnt of a narrow corridor
And at the end a hole, four feet by four,
Through which they pushed them all—the chidren too -
Straight down a shaft of steel thirteen feet long
and dark and icy cold
Onto the concrete floor of what they called
The strangling room. Dear God, the strangling room,
Where they were stunned—the chidren too—
By heavy wooden mallets,

Garroted,and then impaled
On pointed iron hooks

I am glad of the unechoing street
Burnt white in the heat of many tropical years.
For the mind, no longer sharp,
Seared by the tropical sun
skims over the surface of things
Like the wind
That stirs but slightly the ancient dust.

Anne Ranasinghe

BANGLADESH

The Sound of Leaves

War, only war, all twelve
months of the year. Our eyes
are cactus plants,
the thorns growing inward
to pierce our
tenderest nerves.

War, only war,
The orchids on the wall,
the ceiling-fan's whirl overhead,
all suffocate me.
Man sheds civilisation
like a snakeskin
and bares the horror
of his naked face.
North, south, east, west—
no white-horsed hero
from the legends
will come to rescue us.

Each corner of the sky
is pushed down into darkness,
into the mush of rotting corpses
working their poison
on the air. Breath drowns
in this blind sea named time.

Still, sometimes the sound of leaves
makes me open my eyes to the sky.
Again, the mind begins to build its nest
among quiet wings,
the shadow of the shal tree
falls green
over my house
over the smell
of this warm, wet earth.

Razia Hussain

All the poems on war and suffering carried in this issue of THE EYE have been selected and introduced by Gautam Haridas.

VIOLENCE AND HEALTH

MIRA SHIVA

Desmond Morris *Manwatching*

It is violence when it is perpetuated in the name of medicine and when it is a denial of basic health care because of inadequate purchasing power. It is also violence when the poorest of citizens suffer on account of absence of equity and participation in health programmes and policy planning.

Mental Health

In earlier days, people with severe mental disturbances were thought to be possessed by evil spirits and were whipped and beaten within an inch of their lives. Today, the overuse and misuse of Electro Convulsive Therapy (electric shocks) with outdated equipments is rampant. People with mental disorders are incarcerated in jails as there are not enough mental asylums. They lie there, often denied adequate food and clothing, indeed, even recognition of their existence. Over 400 absolutely sane women languish in jails on grounds of insanity based on fake certificates from 'trained' and 'qualified' psychiatrists. Husbands conveniently adopt this strategy for another dowry-rich marriage or for a younger replacement. The medical profession thus aids and abets the slow suffocation of the soul of young women or elderly parents rejected and dumped by their own family members. A person incarcerated as insane loses all rights to property or franchise.

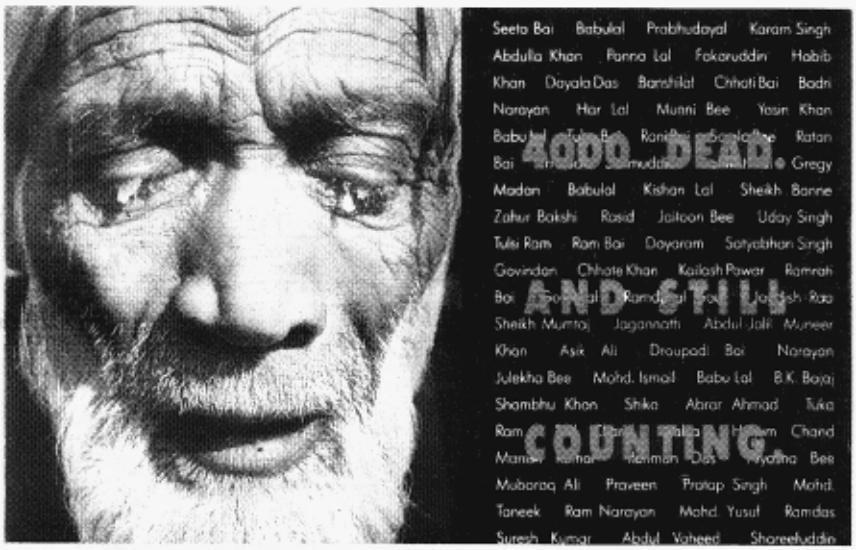
The appalling conditions of mental institutions and outdated methods of dealing with mental health problems combined with an increasingly stressful life, push more and more people towards

severe depression, anxieties, nervous breakdowns, psychosomatic disorders and MDP (Manic Depression). According to the World Mental Health Report, mental disorders will be among the major health problems of the coming century exacerbated by competition and decreasing interactions with the larger extended family, victimised by an alienating urbanised isolation wedded to individualism and instant gratification. Social realities are directly linked to social health, which needs to be addressed as a 'public health concern'.

The 'medical fix' for all this i.e., sedatives, tranquillisers and anti-depressants, has catapulted the pharmaceutical industry into lucrative market possibilities. Prozac is currently the fashion drug of the West. Halcion, another psycho-therapeutic drug, hit the headlines few years ago when its consumption was associated with violent behaviour as a side-effect.

The very concept of health has come to mean 'medical care' which addresses 'physical' health problems alone with specialisation for different 'systems' and different 'organs', spawning a new generation of cardiologists, gastroenterologists and sexologists. This biomedical approach to health is reductionist and has failed to address a majority of health problems. Health has been described (even by the World Health Organisation!) as an optimum balance of physical, mental, social and spiritual well-being. I would add to these, the dimensions of socio-economics and politics.

For instance, let us take a look at the victimisation of women in the domain of health. Women are blamed for producing 'girl' babies even though it is the Y chromosome from the male partner that determines the sex of the foetus. Medical technological interventions now stress (needless) routine episiotomies (cutting of the perinical tissue at birth) and caesarian sections, often merely for higher charges. The same can be said of needless hysterectomies (removal of the uterus) ovariectomies (removal of the ovaries) as well as overuse of female hormones, sometimes for conditions even in which they are strictly contra-indicated. Contraception is the woman's responsibility and we have an interesting statistic to



N. Thiagarajan

Victim of the Bhopal gas Tragedy

prove this. The male responsibility for contraception is grossly inadequate and in fact on the decrease. In the 1960s, 11 per cent all of sterilisations were tubectomies and in 1993, 96 per cent of all sterilisations were tubectomies. Interestingly, there is a proliferation of 'male potency drugs', like 'Spy' and 'Yogi' and 303 ginseng products which have never undergone any clinical trials. These are sold as ayurvedic drugs. Sex education (especially in the context of contemporary diseases like AIDS) stress more on 'technological fixes' for personal disease protection with not enough concern for partner respect. Female foeticide and infanticide, bride burning and increasing consumerism, are linked to the pathological discrimination fostered by medical technologies like aminiocentesis and ultrasound. While there is a law for the regulation of prenatal testing since January 1996, not a single case of violation has been filed—even when thousands of new ultra sound equipment have been sold, specifically for sex-determination tests. Without such misuse, the inverse sex-ratio would cease to deteriorate as it is doing at present, being as low as 600 females per 1000 males.

Denial of basic health care, denial of what forms the *basis* of health is violence. Health can either be treated as a fundamental right of all citizens or as a commodity to be bought and sold, accessible only to those with purchasing power. The increasing pharmaceuticalisation and commodification of health care has resulted in its over-medicalisation, leaving more and more to the increasing irrationality of medical practice. In such a situation, iatrogenesis i.e., 'drug' and 'doctor' induced health problems have become a big issue. The strictness of the FDA (Food & Drug Authority) in the US, and strong consumer protection laws have evolved because of a high incidence of iatrogenesis. If studies were conducted in India on drug utilisation, prescription patterns, medical audit and adverse-reaction monitoring, we shall surely perceive a very high degree of iatrogenesis, since medical care is practiced here by thousands of unqualified and untrained personnel. Many young haemophiliacs, thalassaemics and mothers have been infected with HIV, AIDS and Hepatitis B through blood transfusions.

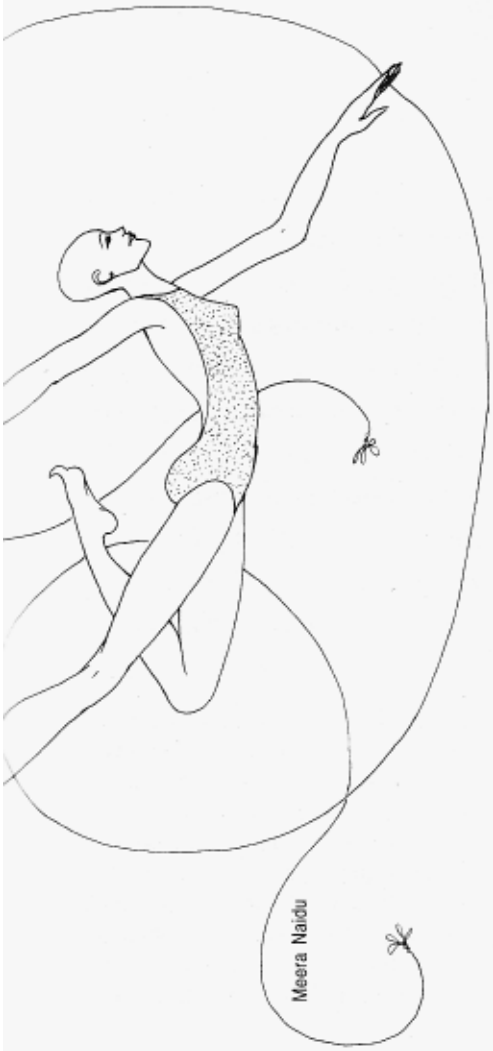
War, apart from its devastating nature, has a direct implication on health. Close on the heels of war follow diarrhoea, cholera and starvation, as victims trudge across country borders. About 70 per cent of refugees are women and children displaced from their hearth and home Armed conflicts throw the economics of nations totally out of gear as do trade embargoes which follow wars.

The spiralling growth of 'anti-health' industries such as liquor, cigarettes, hazardous pesticides, junk food and its aggressive advertising is a direct form of violence on health. People pay not only for the commodity in economic terms, but also in terms of their health and treatments thereafter. While the teratogenic effects of pesticides and

chemicals have been conveniently understated, so has the increasing use of potent pesticides such as Celphos (Aluminum Phosphide) for suicides. Medical research shows that there has been a 50 per cent fall in sperm counts globally, due to a certain blocking action caused by pesticides and chemicals. Those who suffer most include labourers, sprayers and their families as well as those having to rely on water sources where toxic effluents have been dumped. Down the food chain, of course, it is the consumer of these grains, vegetables and fruits who suffer liver and kidney damages, cancers, etc.

Violence in Research

When medical care advances are based on the helplessness and ignorance of people, it is violence. Numerous human clinical trials are conducted without information and adequate informed consent. From research studies in Auschwitz with nerve gases and other toxic products meant for chemical warfare, mostly on women, emerged some of the pesticides of today. Some of the manufacturers who were involved then are still in the business today, even sitting on various boards.



The need to conduct and complete the longitudinal studies of Bhopal gas victims to address the delayed health impacts of MIC and other gases was not considered important because of budget constraints.

Let us look at some horror stories from the recent past. Spraying of children with pesticides by Ciba Geigy to study their side effects is gross ethical violence. Selling of Thalidomide to prevent morning sickness in pregnant women caused at least 40,000 SEAL babies to be born without hands and limbs. This is violence. DES (Diethyl Stilbaestrol) to make normal babies more normal, and recommending it for threatened abortion when its usage in pregnancy actually increased abortions, is violence. When young daughters of women who had consumed DES during pregnancy grew up to reach young adulthood, they developed vaginal adenomas (usually very rare), requiring surgery and very often made them barren. Sons of DES mothers were born with testicular problems, and it was only few years ago that vaginal adenoma was discovered in the granddaughter of a woman who had been prescribed DES during pregnancy. This is violence. The controversial contraceptive trials on women by an US-based private organisation and several private practitioners in India (funded by the same organisation), carry on, despite refusals of clearance from the ICMR, Drug Controller of India and WHO. This is violence in the garb of scientific research. When research in medicines and medical technologies fall into private hands (as public funds are increasingly being cut), one can clearly envisage the precedence of commerce over ethics. Manpower in the Third World is cheaper, so are working costs; and most importantly, regulations and norms can be more easily violated for a few pieces of silver. This is violence. The Magic Remedies Act which forbids advertising of different 'magical' medicines and remedies aimed directly at the consumer is not really implemented and manufacturers rake in profits.

Yet, the need to conduct and complete the longitudinal studies of Bhopal gas victims to address the delayed health impacts of MIC and other gases was not considered important because of budget constraints. Very rarely do studies negatively project products or industrial pollution, in effect, controlling knowledge and unbiased information. This is violence.

Such violence has long term and deep rooted consequences as it fosters a culture of dependency on uneconomical, unsustainable and un-ecological pharmaceuticalised solutions in the name of health. Violence is inherent in the manufacture of zombified people who, unable to analyse and understand the roots of their ill health become pill-popping, dependent and helpless. Policies, programmes and agencies need to be de-privatised, especially for the poor. About 80 per cent of medical care is in private hands and medical care has emerged as the second common cause of rural indebtedness. These people must dwindle to make way for those with purchasing power. They constitute the all important 'market' which will expand by co-option, confusion or corruption.

Dr. Mira Shiva heads the Public Policy Division of Voluntary Health Association of India (VHAI). She has coordinated the Low-Cost Drugs, Rational Therapeutics activities and Rational Drug Policy use. Her contribution to Rational Drug Use was recognised with the Dr. Olle Hansson Award. She is the Coordinator of the All India Drug Action Network, and is the Asian representative of International People's Health Council, Association with Actional Rational Drug, and Educators of Rational Drug Use. She was part of the three-member commission set up by the Supreme Court to investigate the cholera epidemic of 1988. Her major areas of concern are the impact of globalisation on health, and the effect of policies on the marginalised.

CULTURE, POWER, POLITICS

TOWARDS A CRITIQUE OF THE CULTURE OF CONSENT

K. SATCHIDANANDAN

Hegemonic cultural activity is a calculated exercise of power meant to shape the will of the people in ways favourable to the dominant groups. The power of cultural institutions is so subtle that it even appears as a kind of freedom. The popular media fills our leisure with hegemonic myths that depoliticises all discourse, conceal the origins of wealth and power and constructs a pseudo-reality. . . . The choice of counter-cultural strategies is not an abstract theoretical question but a concrete practical question related to democratic struggle. This grim connection between culture, power and politics unleashes a regime of untold violence on the psyche.

Today 'culture' is no more a superstructural phenomenon, large scale cultural production having become an inseparable part of capitalist economic activity. The contemporary 'culture industry' embraces literature, music, dance, painting and sculpture, besides, of course, mass communication through a tentacular network of publishing houses, periodicals, radio, television and the record and cassette industries, which not only reproduce art and literature and manipulate information but affect the very *definition*, structure and consent of culture as well as control tastes, attitudes and world views.

Antonio Gramsci was the first major theoretician to recognise the political implications of cultural hegemony and examine the reactionary ideological connotations of popular culture including pulp-fiction, crime-thrillers and popular carnivals to which we may today add the formula-film, the television soap, some forms of pop-music and spectator-sports. Instead of merely *reflecting* the unequal society, they *help* the dominant sections to shape, maintain and govern that society by promoting status-quoist styles of life and thought. The dominant ideology creates an inverted image of the world we live in and makes people internalise and 'live' that image, so that their consent to the system seems natural and spontaneous. Subaltern groups and communities make sense of their world through an ensemble of cultural presuppositions that Gramsci calls 'common sense'—a pre-theoretical, unsystematic, inchoate and contradictory

form of consciousness. When its conduct is 'normal', i.e., submissive and subordinate, 'common sense' is reactionary, having borrowed its conceptions from the ruling groups. However it is not entirely regressive—along with the elements of dominant ideology it also carries progressive and autonomous elements that Gramsci calls 'good sense'. The plasticity of 'common sense' allows it to be selectively appropriated and reconstituted by various political forces. A counter-hegemonic critique of 'common sense' should unify and reinforce its elements of 'good sense' and help people recognise the hegemonic techniques of differentiation, legitimation, institutionalisation and rationalisation that have produced them as consenting subjects. Only then can they reconstitute themselves as dissenting subjects ready to smash the truth-producing machinery of the ruling elite and to produce their own alternate truths.

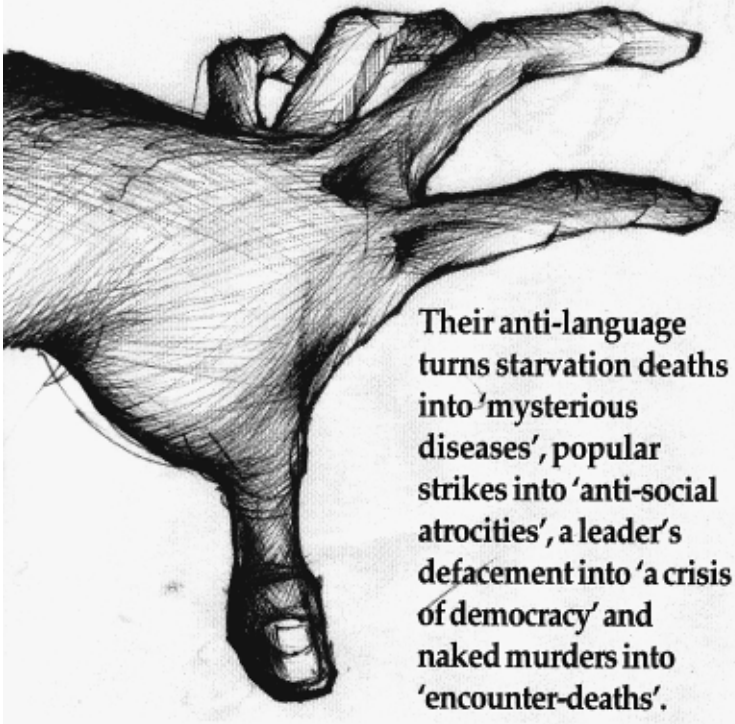
Power today weighs on us not only as a force that says no, but it traverses and produces things and induces pleasure, and sets into operation, mechanisms and instances to produce truth-effects—a 'regime of truth' as Michel Foucault calls it. Power does not exist abstractly, it exists only when it is put into action. A power-relationship is not necessarily a relationship of violence; the opposite pole of violence can only be passivity. On the other hand, a power-relationship involves the thorough recognition of the 'other' as an active person. Power acts upon the actions of persons rather than the persons themselves. It is an action upon an action that incites, induces, seduces, renders easier or more difficult. Power, thus, structures their possible fields of action. Freedom too is not abstract; it comes into being only through resistance to power. The fields of control are also fields of struggle. There is a reciprocal appeal between a relationship of power and a strategy of struggle. A relationship of power may at any moment become a confrontation between two adversaries; a confrontation may similarly turn into a relationship of power.

Hegemonic cultural activity is thus a calculated exercise of power meant to shape the will of the people in ways favourable to the dominant groups. It brings into operation a whole micro-physics of power that often works invisibly, producing a cultural consensus that destroys popular autonomy and vital heterogeneity. This hegemony is by no means static; it reproduces itself and also reforms itself in response to new challenges. However it also produces its opposite while at the same time limiting it—the romantic and the avant-garde forms of artistic revolt exemplify this double function of hegemonic ideology. They oppose dominant art yet also remain bound by it and finally get absorbed into it. Aesthetic rebellions evolve into radical breaks with the past only during certain historical conjunctures when they are linked to economic and political transformations. This is not to question the validity of artistic struggles but only to point to their objective limitations that spring as much from history as from the nature of the 'public sphere' during a specific period. One should also remember the key ideological role of the educational apparatus of the modern state that promotes certain kinds of cultural attitudes and concepts. Education perpetuates dominant critical institutions with their empirical-idealist interpretations of works that tie down their meaning to one of their possible texts and founds 'literature' around the authorial institution. It creates a cleavage in language by promoting a special 'literary language' different from the language of daily use. Thus education mystifies the collective origin of art, literature and culture and denies their objective basis by representing them as manifestations, purely of individual genius and creativity. Education is a constituent of culture, but it pretends that it can only comment on culture or disseminate it, never appropriate it.

Power, in cultural institutions, is often exercised so subtly that it even appears as a kind of freedom. This is true of the communication network too. It is wrong to think that first there is reality and then communication about it. Communication is not secondary. Reality is *constructed* and transformed by communication that may involve linguistic practices or pre-linguistic modes like film or television.

THE EYE Archives

As we get used to the popular media, we tend to forget that their worldview is only one of the many ways of looking at the world and that their view may reflect certain vested interests.



Their anti-language turns starvation deaths into 'mysterious diseases', popular strikes into 'anti-social atrocities', a leader's defacement into 'a crisis of democracy' and naked murders into 'encounter-deaths'.

Communication always involves ideology in the form of an attitude, a tone, form or style. As we get used to certain newspapers, forms of fiction, radio and TV programmes, we tend to forget that their worldview is only one of the many ways of looking at the world, and that their view may reflect a community or a group with certain vested interests. In societies like ours, the public involved in communication is continuously being extended, but ownership and control of the means of communication are being narrowed through the establishment of monopolies. Expansion does not necessarily mean growth—it is easier to devise a quick-selling synthetic culture than to struggle for a genuinely new and liberating one. A close look at our popular fiction, film, theatre or television will show how they exploit the present culture of silence not by articulating it but by filling the silence of the people with the articulations of the dominant groups. Paulo Freire used to say that our system of education is a cultural invasion; our system of communication is no different—it colonises even our unconscious through its manufactured images and invisible *weltanschauungs*.

Truth-production is thus monopolised by the state and its allies through a subtle control of all discourses. Discourses come into being to share experience and knowledge, but under capitalist control, selling becomes more urgent than sharing. So the packaging of experience—its gloss and external fascination—becomes more important than the experience itself. This gloss, as Raymond Williams points out, gradually begins to replace experience. Advertisement becomes the basic model of all communication. Superficiality, sensationalism and speed become all-important. The layout of a periodical, the cinematography of a film or the cover of a book becomes more important than their content. Art and film criticism has already absorbed this attitude—trends like stylistics in literary criticism too reflect it. Let me not be mistaken; I am not invoking the old undialectical form-content controversy, I am speaking here not of the 'form', but of the 'gloss' of packaging. The label alone becomes important; the loudest bidder carries the day. In India, where, to use William's well-known classification, the authoritarian, the paternal and the commercial modes of communication have a dominating co-existence, the genuinely democratic mode is a permanent casualty. Counter-media are yet to grow into a real challenge to the hegemonic ones since capital is committed to obstruct their proliferation and limit their circulation. Our newspaper and news magazine network with its monopoly capital ownership and its dependence on the imperialist information order, complements our schooling systems by structuring global and national reality in the service of the ruling elite. The way they have equated the recent fall of Stalinism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe with the end of socialism and made the crisis serve the interests of multinational capitalism, is a case in point. Dominant ideology operates here subtly, by a careful filtering of information, a clever use of tone, manner and emphasis and a political use of cartoons and photographs. The so-called 'investigative reports' and 'stories' are designed to drown all objectivity in a wealth of details and turn tragedies into spectacles through a jargon where words retain their emotive halos but lose their referential significance. Their anti-language turns starvation deaths into 'mysterious diseases', popular strikes into 'anti-social atrocities', a leader's defacement into 'a crisis of democracy' and naked murders into 'encounter-deaths'. This class-bias is coupled with a gender-bias that either commodifies or oversexualises the female body.

The 'serial-novel' (or the popular soaps for that matter) is an extension of this ideological industry. It is not to be discarded lightly as it is actually taking part in a public discourse legitimising the status-quo by representing social tensions in simplified, moralising ways that appeal to 'common sense'. All modernisation is here posed as a threat to social security and familial loyalty. Traditional values are reinforced through an affirmation of the patriarchal ethos, while the capitalist ethic is encouraged by a total identification of success with affluence. The 'serial novel' divides social space into a 'public sphere' of politics and social action dominated by the male and a 'private sphere' of love, marriage and family reserved for the female. Every attempt at freedom by a female is cited as an example of moral degeneration and is shown to lead inevitably to self-destruction. Individual 'achievement' is always glorified; the callous careerist is upheld as a model for all to emulate. Marriage is celebrated as the only destination and the final refuge of women; the idyllic rustic society is elevated into a realm of radiance in stark contrast to the modern urban inferno with its licentious ways of life.

To a great extent, the same applies to the popular film. These entertainers form a kind of counter-folklore that combines the basic thematic elements of folk tales to create a world of spectacle, romance, fantasy and wish-fulfilment. The hero of these films generally belongs to the upper class or is an agent of its ethic and conduct. The comedians are servants and workers and the villains are proletarianised in their

appearance and behaviour. Women are stereotyped variously as spineless and dependent, jealous, adulterous, greedy or self-sacrificing, submissive or domineering—an equal relationship between man and woman is beyond their imagination. The domestic is equated with marriage and a promise of male support that confers security and respectability and legitimises motherhood. A solitary woman is always portrayed either as insecure or as male-hunting. Politics is either shunned or all politics is presented as decadent and deceptive. Rightist politics generally appears in this apolitical mask. People are seldom shown as having the ability to liberate themselves. The old distinction between the 'commercial film' and the 'art film' no more holds good in India today, since the so-called art films too, once they enter the cycle of the capital, turn into commodities, fetching great profits chiefly through export. The majority of them are not very different from the commercials in their ideological implications—the difference is mainly of the language. The commercial film exults in overstatement while the art film prefers understatement. The entire institution is also supported by a subculture that includes gossip magazines, star worship, film criticism and film music—a dubious and sometimes dangerous mix. The same could be said of the film-dance, a genre that swings between cabaret and Kathak.

Television has been called the poisoned chalice, since it threatens to uproot authentic regional cultures, bulldozing them into flat, uniform and dull versions of a non-existent 'Indian culture'—a glossy synthetic authoritarian-populist version of culture, a grotesque mixture of the soap-opera and the classical dance, of pop music and spectator-sports. Romila Thapar in her critique of the TV *Ramayana* has examined how the *Ramacharit Manas*, its chief literary source, serves the north Indian, Hindi and Vaishnavite dominations at the same time, at the cost of the infinite variety and vitality of the local versions of *Ramayana*. Television promotes consumerism, creating artificial needs and competitive snobbery and invades our unconscious by subtly changing our tastes and our perceptions of art and reality. It encourages a *nouveau riche* culture of the fast food and the Barbie doll, of the forest-loving urban kids and Disney comics with

Courtesy: National School of Drama, New Delhi

The choice of counter-cultural strategies is not an abstract theoretical question but a practical one related to democratic struggle. A scene from Vijay Tendulkar's ***Ghasiram Kotwal****, a powerful and controversial play questioning dominant ideologies*

their Third World savages and their beautiful conquerors—a world whose ideological connotations have been uncovered by Dorfman and Mattelart.

All the popular media we have examined so far manipulate our leisure by filling it with hegemonic myths that depoliticise all discourse, conceal the origins of wealth and power and freeze the possibilities of resistance by turning history into nature through a carefully codified second-order semiological system designed to construct a pseudo-reality. Many of the cultural carnivals sponsored by capital endorse the hegemonic consciousness by destroying the autonomy of creative communities, uprooting even the folk arts from their natural soil of rural ritual and turning them into articles of urban consumption. Such patronage is aimed at appropriating people's culture, reducing it into an artefact delinked from life and experience, infusing it with the dominant ideology, centralising and monopolising it and turning it into an arm of diplomacy. It is another major threat to our cultural heterogeneity, reducing culture into a symbol of power cutting it off from the ensemble of the real social processes that gave it shape.

A profound understanding of the play of power behind cultural manifestations should form the basis of counter-hegemonic cultural action. When the oppressing group ex-nominates itself through its depoliticised discourses, the oppressed should rename and re-politicise every discourse. To take the offensive, the victims should know what the enemy knows, why and how he knows it and how to contest him on any ground. Resistance requires we change our tactics when the enemy learns new tricks. The choice of counter-cultural strategies is not an abstract theoretical question but a concrete practical one related to democratic struggle. We must learn to develop democratic plurality in our cultural practices: the socialist should learn to co-exist with the Dalit and feminist manifestations of counter-culture. We must take into account the specificity of cultural forms as well as that of the cultural communities to which they appeal. A celebration of Safdar Hashmi need not rule out the possibilities of the proscenium stage, of Mahashwetadevi, of surrealist fiction or of Gaddar or Arun Kamble, of more complex literary articulations. What we require is a multi-layered, varied and dynamic concept of radical art, literature and culture that rises above sectarian considerations through a recognition of our complex reality and our multiple identity and through a great flexibility of techniques and strategies.

Professor K. Satchidanandan is an eminent poet, literary journalist, translator, feminist and educationist. His body of work concerns itself with subjects as diverse as politics, culture, social dynamics and theatre. He has won numerous awards for literature and is currently Secretary, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi.

Illustrations: **Oroon Das**

GUTTER SYNDROME

OROON DAS

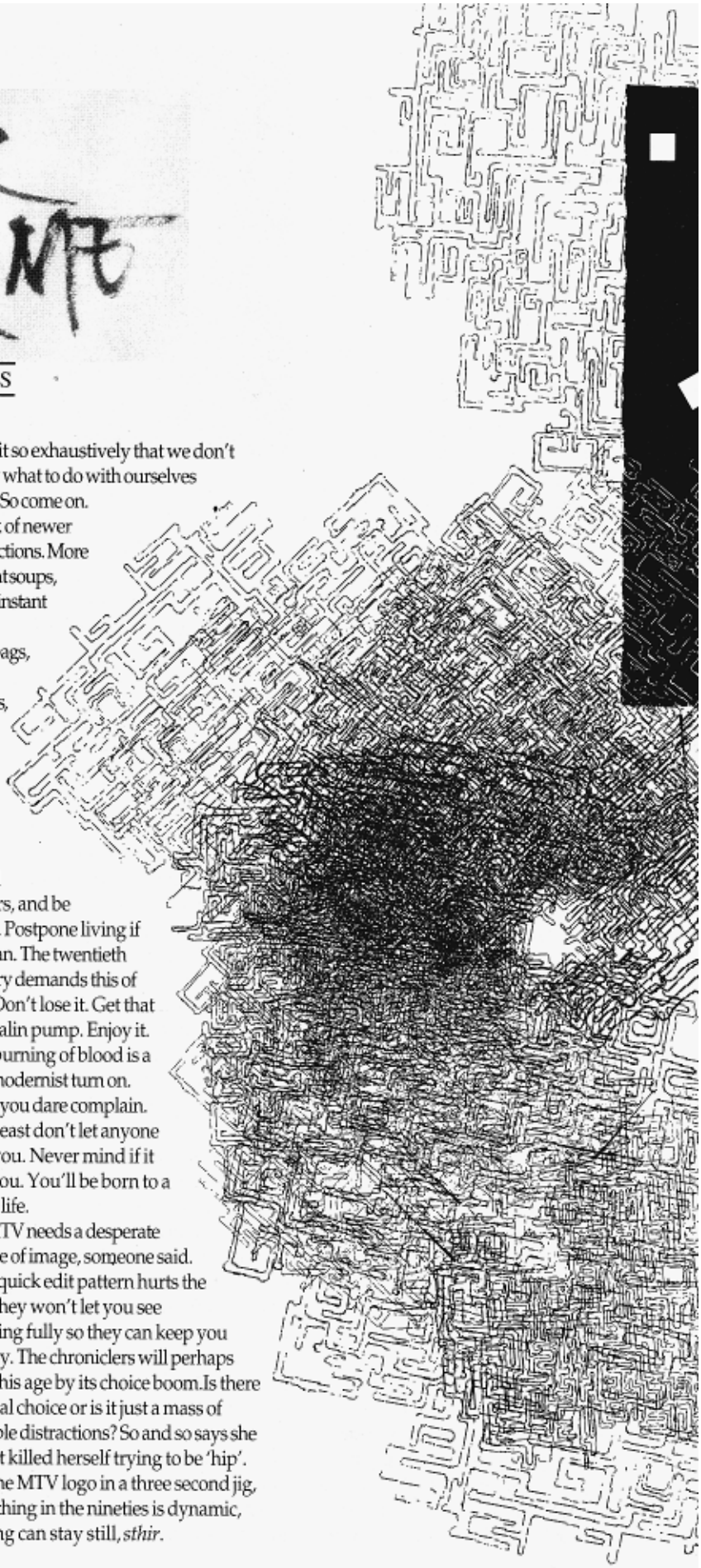
That's what they called it.

And we all laughed. There was something relieving about laughing then. Something that rarefied the density under the skull and cooled the heat inside. Once on my way back from school, I saw one of those roadside telephone boxes open, with perhaps a million wires all hanging out and running into each other, strangling each other and trying to get ahead of each other. Each firmly rooted, almost too sure. None without agenda. Like it is in the houses of parliament. All securely rooted in their own respective tubs of selfishness. And all this spaghetti packed neatly inside a complacent, mundane looking gray box by the roadside. The thousands that pass by it everyday—could they really ever imagine what the entrails of this stoic establishment are like, the aggression packed within, the speed of the juices in those wires, the decibel levels? I can imagine shattering sounds wanting to tear open those iron doors. Sometimes I can hear it much louder and it feels like the skin around my temples is going to tear and my skull is going to go flying out like the lid of a pressure cooker.

And to know that all this noise, all this pent up pressure-cooker pressure is but in the mind. A figment of my imagination. How can I complain? Where security of every kind is not only free but a given, a constant, like furniture, where does my license to nurture this inner violence come from? As if it were a cultural statement.

Is there not enough pain? Perhaps not. The mass of hi-falutin lifestyles with all its ingredients must have something to do with the number of babies baked in ovens and other such novelties, fuelling the craving for new, different, crazy things. Have we really come to the end of the tether of our creative set? Have we truly done it so exhaustively that we don't know what to do with ourselves now? So come on. Think of newer distractions. More instantsoups, more instant soaps, beanbags, sci fis, WWFs, dino-saurs pop-ping out of vinyl coated posters, and be quick. Postpone living if you can. The twentieth century demands this of you. Don't lose it. Get that adrenalin pump. Enjoy it. That burning of blood is a post modernist turn on. Don't you dare complain. Or at least don't let anyone hear you. Never mind if it kills you. You'll be born to a better life.

MTV needs a desperate change of image, someone said. Their quick edit pattern hurts the eye. They won't let you see anything fully so they can keep you hungry. The chroniclers will perhaps label this age by its choice boom.Is there any real choice or is it just a mass of multiple distractions? So and so says she almost killed herself trying to be 'hip'. Like the MTV logo in a three second jig, everything in the nineties is dynamic, nothing can stay still, *sthir*.



They won't let you see anything fully so they can keep you hungry.

This morning I was awake surprisingly early. I didn't know what to do with myself. I had to feel productive in a hurry. I had to feel disciplined. Now that my morning was early like for all disciplined achievers, I had to proceed to do other appropriate things. Like should I brush my teeth or should I sit in bed and say a prayer, perhaps I should finish inking the artwork that I had left uninked last night, no, I should do something inspiring to begin the day with, should I remember Ramakrishna while inside the quilt or should I sit up, spine straight. Oh, but it is so cold. Never mind the cold. Just fling the blanket aside and start the day. Maybe I haven't slept enough. How come I'm up so early? How can I forget that this lethargy, this inertia is a sin? There's no point in trying to shut my eyes to the day that has already arrived with just enough time for me to get active and start achieving. So many life-postponers have cribbed about this shortage of time. So I flung my blanket aside almost in a burst of decided action and then stood, shoulders hitched up to my ears in my red Sahmat T-shirt and swimming trunks, January, 7a.m., perhaps 5 degrees.

Suddenly it struck me. I ran to the basement, shivering. I was back in a second with the *tanpura* cassette that Ivon, Guruji's French student, had taped for me. This is it. This is how I should start each day of my life. I shut my eyes tight. After sometime, as I continued to chant Om, I felt my scattered world coming together between my eyebrows. I pressed my eyelids harder. Almost felt dizzy. I tried to hear my voice. It sounded nice. My shoulders relaxed and as I started Bhairav I could feel silence around me, perhaps inside of me. I could hear clearly and singly.

It was perhaps after my tenth boards that I went to Guruji under a Gurukul Scholarship scheme. Yes, it was before the Board results. I remember waiting for shooting stars in the clear evening sky, my head on Guruji's lap. I had never seen him before. Not even in a concert. From the day I knew that I'd got the scholarship, I kept trying to conjure up images of a *gurukul* in my head. Thatched roofs, open spaces, a large banyan tree, some goats perhaps or a cow, severe early mornings, austere white *dhotis*, *dal-roti* and fruits, no unnecessary chitter-chatter, only prayers, *riyaz* and personal journals tucked away under floor beddings ... but of course I was being silly. Instead, we were enrolled into a new family. That was my first long stay out of home and I was never allowed to feel like I was with strangers. That one month was a slice apart from the rest of my life. Never did I feel more secure and free. Never have I met a man more complete. And so was my surrender—complete and unquestioning. Absolute surrender. And the experience thereafter, the feeling of being lead, my little finger firmly in his hand, a feeling i had never known. This is how it must be with God, I thought, I mean with religious people. This whole thing of faith. Where you can surrender your body and action to a higher entity. You begin to live, secure in the knowlege that to do is your only prerogative. Ego could cease to exist, for instance. Fear of failure, jealousy, threat of competition, all this could be rendered meaningless.

From as long back as I can remember, praise was for those in control, whether it was the prefect of the class or even my mother who was challenged to silence me in a greater hurry with my every subsequent defiance. And there are those who pay dearly for such applause. Power must be a way of judging foolish people from the wise.

Funny, how a poor, unshaven *pujari* of an old temple with algaed walls, my Ramakrishna, the mad man, still, after a century of his death, continues to lead and command the lives of thousands of people the world over. And Hitler—he had to finally kill himself.

Wasn't it Schumacher who wrote *Small is Beautiful*? Once on my way back from Delhi, from the Ramakrishna Kutir in Almora, I had asked myself why the hills were always so peaceful. Maybe because people lived there in small groups. They all seemed to be living in each other's lives. There's none of that 'my space' fetish. They cut the trees and lit their smoky *chulhas* in small groups and the smoke from their earthen *chulhas* had a lovely, warm, home smell. But they grow and other things grow into them. Developers come and break their homes. Maruti, who helps my mother at home, left his own in Garhwal last year because he didn't want to weave shawls and caps. He wanted to do 'service' instead, as jobs are called in rural lingo. He believes that one day he will wear a suit and sit near a phone. He studied till the seventh class, he said. How funny that there must come a time when what they teach at school stands face to face with what they teach at home while you just wait there shifting your weight from one foot to the other.

Maruti's mother must miss him.

At the *gurukul*, I did never had to show my enthusiasm to learn. I did not have to compare or contest. There were some who had stopped going to school quite early. For years, it was only that 100 odd square metres that nourished them. But there was no apology; they were wholesome and rooted, each nurturing a dream, each striving for excellence, each praying for the day they could touch the genius of their guru. There was a kind of empowerment in the idiom of that place

that was as natural and automatic as the first morning *riyaz*. My mother would call it *samskar*. Where I could just be, without threat or fear or shame. What freedom ! I was suddenly angry that I had never felt like this in all my years of expensive schooling.

I wonder if it is possible to be completely free of anger. Like the Baul singers with their open and unmixed defiance. One of them appeared on the front porch of my grandmother's house in Calcutta. Summer vacations after class five exams. All us cousins in our frocks and knikkers ran down when we heard him and crowded around my grandmother's *anchal*. He burst into song when he saw us. His tobacoo smile and his little liquid eyes set in his black face—still very vivid. My grandmother told me that he was a man of God. I thought it unfair and asked her why God didn't give him a home to live in, why he was left to wander homeless in the sun. And she told me that all homes on earth were his. All mothers and fathers and children living in those homes were his too. And with such a large family he was not afraid of anyone, not even of the hot sun.

There was nothing he could lose. Unlike me. So much of my life has come to be dictated by fear of losing, of losing my face when I lie to my client, of losing hold when my peers find flaws in my arguments or my work. How I hate all those wars within and without, all but to protect the untruths of my history.

It is quiet here again. All I can hear is a dog, nervously barking away into the unhearing night. He is lonely. I wish to be alone too. Why, I can't say. I wish to borrow some silence. Will it help the night to seep inside, to silence this beating of drums inside my chest? Will it calm him down—the dog? Something is burning in my stomach. The long cigarette I just smoked must've set it afire. Cigarette after cigarette, like there was something to strangle with the nooses of smoke. But it only burns with more redness, amber. Perhaps, I should drink some water instead. What is this frenzy? What is this sissy nervousness? I know I am not a pathological case. Not a psycho. No, not all that savvy. None of that nervous breakdown, high drama. My sanity is intact. But I can tell the difference. The difference from when I never smoked anything, for instance. When I sang and acted in plays and recited poems, when I studied not to please anyone but myself and when I wept through all that homework with my mother.

HOME! Oh my God, that's a threatening thought. What happened to that one? What did I do with it? I think I tore it to shreds. I can hear it. Like tearing sugercane with my teeth. Will they have me back? Why do I bother asking? I know they will, unconditionally. My mother will. Mothers are the strangest of God's creatures. They are a species apart. So is she, my mother. She cooks and she cleans and loves compulsively. She weeps and goes on loving. She is my mother. She is wise. She could rule this country. But one day I discovered that I had lost her—in smoke perhaps? In posters and designs of brochures, in overnight deliveries and five figured n u m b e r s ... that six lettered entity—m o t h e r.

Yes, numbers. How long did it take for their magical spell to vanish—poof? For the magic to last, the numbers must recur. And I'll give my life to make them do that! There's nothing more important than numbers. Indeed more important than life itself. It's the eternal truth, the *satyam*. This large-mouthed, greedy *satyam* of my times, this crude, abrasive, *satyam*. He feeds on lives. He has eaten my friends, my friendships. And happy family evenings, evening walks, story books and stories that so many *nanis* will secretly take to their pyre. Has he always been like this, this number-man, or I have stoked his hunger since my birth? This *satyam* has led so many by their little finger to high rises and toppled them from there. Sinister. Some sort of crazy ritual, this. I watch as friends prepare meticulously every morning down to their tie-pins and Dior colognes for this ritual, day after day, year after year, and I feel afraid. Their lives remind me of large, hurtling highway trucks, too fast to be seen or see out if you happen to be in one of them. Only a short, passing scream. Their mobile phones, those quick, fat hamburgers, the gel in their hair, their fast speech ... Are they secretly rebelling against him? Will they ever know what he did to them? Their mothers will.

My mother, I'm sure, wonders sometimes why at all she sent me to school. Funny how we take love so much for granted and our own capacity for it. How that dreamy sing song can turn so painfully divisive. Haven't we all been there when love meant not compassion but hatred?

I have an uncle in Canada and his family—my aunt and my two cousins, Shoumo and Shourabh. They used to visit us more often when we were younger. Everything was a celebration then. Their arrivals and departures, the in-betweens, preludes and aftermath.

I was very fond of Shoumo, the elder one, much older to me then. Now tóo, I suppose.

He loved wearing kurta pyjamas. His Yank-ed out Bengali was endearing. It's been several years since I last heard from him. Wonder what his language sounds like now.

It was on one particular summer visit of theirs, when Ma put me into Bal Bhavan, that I began to want to know my country. And guess why? Because I had to show her off. I remember I suddenly felt like a grown up man, her man, almost apolo-

getic, consumed by this passion to defend her completely before the mightier and more glamorous. Head down, dragging my blue water bottle, I remember being quite disturbed about not being able to fathom why it was not the same as before, why I was not able to enjoy my two cousins as I did earlier. For the first time I touched the unyielding wall that stood between us. It was as if we belonged to two teams in a rugby match. Everytime they complained about the dirt on the roads or the long queues in the bank, I felt a helplessness that I feel somewhat proud of today, for it was my first political stand.

So much of my life has come to be dictated by fear of losing.

I think that was also the first time that I ever felt divorced from another on account of a feeling of belonging to one.

Last night, when I finally turned in and lay next to my love, blood had frozen around the bandages of a sealed relationship. Like the maroon lacquer on postal parcels stitched in light yellow cloth. The bed was warm bed under my back.The last few months we had found monsters hiding in me. What happened to our frictionless, egoless relationship? I never thought that I could love myself so blindingly. I burnt her once with a cigarette. It was handy. She only shed slow tears of compassion for my weakness, the precipitate of man's constant preoccupation with the outside at the complete neglect of what could be within. No wonder he is such a lonely man.

I turned and put an arm around her as she lay on her side, hugging her like a spoon, taking her shape. Her belly felt warm against my cold hand. I felt a little hollow in the centre of my palm. I hugged her closer against my chest and buried my face in her back. As I shut my eyes to the night outside, I found a night within, very quiet, dark blue. I turned and looked up. There was no ceiling, I could see only stars. Suddenly I was enveloped in a vast space, a dark blue space, way beyond her little seventh storey room. It felt like the hills where time stood still. Where I didn't have to worry about the night being burnt by the morning sun. Where the stars were going to stay awhile till I found my dreams. 'Oh, remember me to my dreams,' I said to them, 'I don't want to fight no more.'

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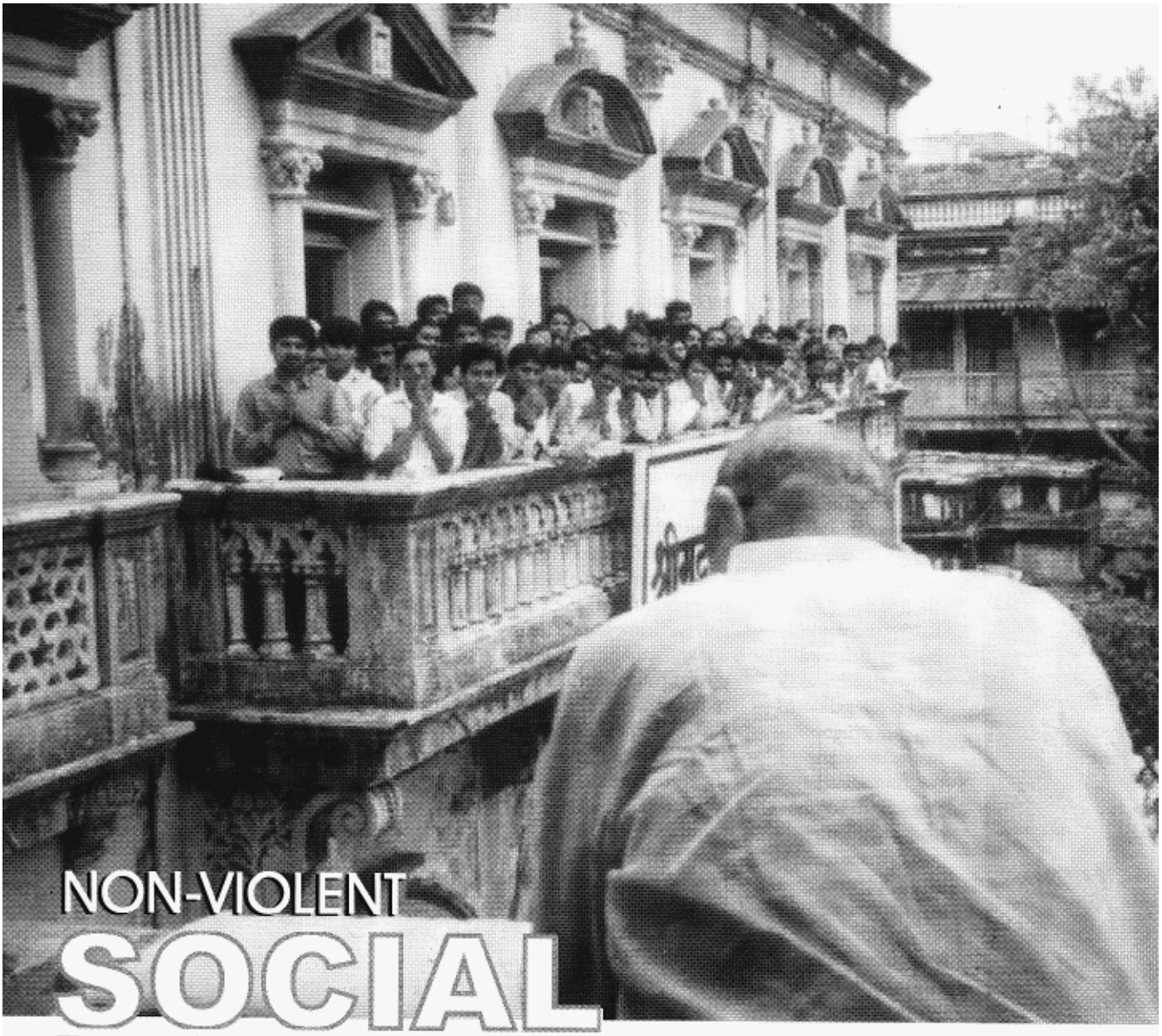


NON-VIOLENT SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

Sanskrit Pathshala, Mumbai

LESSONS FROM SWADHYAYA

MAKARAND PARANJAPE

I must start with my uneasy relationship with the discursive environment within which issues such as non-violence and social transformation are raised. What are features and limitations of this discursive environment? In my opinion, the chief feature of Indian academic (and semi-academic) discourse is its legacy of colonialism. The main outcome of such a legacy, our subservience to western knowledge systems and our departure from traditional ones. Even at its best, our academia functions through a disassociation of thought and action, creating idealogues not exemplars. In a sub-imperial system such as ours, academics is often counter-productive and self-serving. The academic system is thus a part of the problem, not of the solution. Without contesting the dominant discourse of Indian academics, therefore, no useful intervention in the world of ideas can be made.

So, there are two kinds of discourses in India: one accepts and perpetuates the agenda of the West, while the other tries to alter and resist it according to its own needs; one is colonised, the other is anti-colonial; one modern, the other is traditional; one is Eurocentric, the other indigenist; and so on. To deny the internal struggle in Indian academics between two such discourses, to pretend that all of us belong to the same discourse, or worse, to claim that only one discourse exists, does in fact, shut out all dialogue. It also implies that we take neither ourselves nor academics seriously. I know I am exaggerating, but I do so advisedly: if we, as intellectuals, do not prove our utility to society, we will be left behind. We can no longer afford to ignore the daily realities that face us.

Independent India: An Unfinished Project

Now what is the sum total of these realities that are staring us in the face? Simply speaking, it is this: there is something terribly amiss in the project of independent India. Amazingly, all shades of opinion in the Indian political spectrum accept the truth of the matter. The Left endorses it as does the extreme Right. If the centrist parties, especially the Congress, are tardy in acknowledging it, that is only because of their own complicity and responsibility in the issue. Simply speaking, the truth is that we are in bad shape as a country and as a civilisation. In other words, the whole country is gradually but surely rejecting the belief that the gigantic mass movement which culminated with the independence of India has, in fact, produced the society that it had envisaged and promised. Freedom was achieved, but the society which this freedom was meant to produce is yet to be achieved. In a word, we have failed.

The first one to realise this failure of our dreams was Mahatma Gandhi himself. On the very day that India was keeping its tryst with destiny in a glittering ceremony at the Viceroy's Palace in New Delhi, Gandhi was keeping another tryst with destiny at Calcutta, trying to save the city from its worst communal conflagaration. While Nehru and his descendants became the symbols and beneficiaries of the transfer of power, the lonely Mahatma was continuing the other struggle to bring about *purna swaraj*. In a sense, as Rajiv Vohra of the Gandhi Peace Foundation, Delhi, so eloquently put it, at the very dawn of independence, we thus see two Indias, one centred in Delhi, representing the power and authority of the state, the other in every little village and locality of India, representing the unfinished agenda of the independence movement.

This struggle of the latter India will never cease, because it is not merely a political or social struggle, but a moral and spiritual one. That is the quest of the metaphysical India, the India which, to use Raja Rao's words, is not just a *desa*, but a *darsana*. The struggle to free India is not yet over. In fact, the time has come to dedicate ourselves in large numbers to this struggle. Every society will find ways and means of preserving itself. If the official channels of finding satisfaction—the state, the political system and the bureaucracy fail, it will look elsewhere. It will find alternatives. It will raise new leaders who will intervene directly.

Therefore, as we prepare to enter the twenty-first century, I see a renewed challenge to assert India's nation-soul, to put out all its powers not only for its preservation, but for the creation of a society which is in consance with its native genius.

If the official channels of finding satisfaction—the state, the political system and the bureaucracy fail, it will look elsewhere. It will find alternatives. It will raise new leaders who will intervene directly.

The Sources of Social Transformation

This is where the topic I have chosen becomes relevant. It is my belief that the impetus for social transformation and *real* reform in India comes from its religious and spiritual traditions. Swami Vivekananda said, a hundred years back, that if you want to act on India, to change it, you have to act on its religion. Religion is the keynote. This is echoed by Gandhi and Aurobindo. Almost all the major reform movements of the nineteenth century drew their inspiration from religion and acted on religion. Raja Rammohun Roy, Dayanand Saraswati, Sri Ramakrishna—they were all religious leaders—as were Jyotiba Phule and B. R. Ambedkar. Even the Indian National Congress, it can be argued, was an offshoot of the spiritual self of India. Further back in Indian history, to the challenge of Islam, India responded with a new religion—Sikhism. Earlier, we see how the Buddha transformed Indian society by offering a new path to emancipation. Similarly, in modern times, India responded to the challenge of the West, with modern Hinduism. What I have been suggesting throughout is that it is *sanatana dharma*, that reservoir of infinite capacity, which furnishes us the wherewithal to alter our social and political institutions. It is not to be equated with any sect or religion, but is the source of them all. Even secular enlightenment preaching the gospel of liberty, equality and fraternity, only embellishes *sanatana dharma*. I believe that it is *sanatana dharma* which must be tapped if we wish to bring about social transformation.

The rest of my paper is an attempt to illustrate this with reference to Swadhyaya, a mass movement inspired by the teachings of Pandurang Shastri Athavale or Dada as he is affectionately called. I will focus on how Swadhyaya tackles three of our most intractable social problems—caste, religion, and gender inequality. The empowerment that results from Swadhyaya is both real and radical, yet it is qualitatively different from what is expected or produced by modern methods.

The Challenge of Swadhyaya

I must admit at the outset that, for somewhat self-contradictory reasons, it is not easy for me to write about Swadhyaya. Let me address this difficulty briefly. I went with a large group of distinguished people on a 'Prayog Darshan' from 6 to 11 August 1996. This was the Ahmedabad–Veraval–Rajkot–Bombay circuit, with trips to the Bhangi and Vaghri *chawls*. It also included two Amritalayam villages, a fisherfolks' *basti*, Shri Darshanam, Nirmal Neer, Vruksh Mandir, Bhav Nirjhar and Tatvajanana Vidyapeeth, and finally Dadaji's *pravachan* at Madhav Bagh, Khetwadi.

The second difficulty, which is harder to tackle, concerns the entire process of my understanding of Swadhyaya. I shall have to speak about this process briefly in order to clarify my point. Though I had heard about it earlier, I was formally introduced to Swadhyaya through a seminar which Rajiv Vohra had organised in Rajendra Bhavan on 17 February 1996. A series of encounters with Swadhyaya subsequently took place. But my immersion in it was not gradual and incremental. Frankly, from the very first meeting at Rajendra Bhavan, I felt that I was no stranger to the principles, premises, or objectives of Swadhyaya. Without knowing anything about it, I was already, to use a recently coined phrase, a 'co-Swadhyayi'. I shared the cultural, civilisational, philosophical outlook of the movement. I was in

agreement with its aims and objectives. And I was also attracted to its methods.

One of the things that made Swadhyaya so unique and effective was that it offered a way of translating theory into practice. *Kriti-bhakti*, by its very definition, implied devotion, which was expressed through action. Without such a translation, there could be no Swadhyaya movement. It became clear to me that reducing Swadhyaya to a topic of academic debate was futile and counter-productive. It was better to become a Swadhyayi at whatever level, or keep quiet. Mere intellectual analysis would be self-serving, adding yet another topic to the endless chain of ideas with which we have been habituated to playing. What became clear was that there was something wrong with us, the Indian 'intellectuals', not with Swadhyaya.

If so, I become even more self-conscious as I write this. What is the use of this essay? Is it merely to praise Swadhyaya, to express my admiration for its amazing results? If, on the other hand, I indulge in some armchair criticism without any actual practice either of Swadhyaya itself or of a similar creative devotion, of what use is my criticism? We intellectuals have been totally divorced from any practice. There is no consistency in our *achar*, *vichar*, and *anubhav*. If so, then of what use is our praise or criticism of Swadhyaya, which is built upon the solid foundations of silent, devoted, and disciplined work? I think it best to be silent, best to say nothing at all but, for a change, do something. I still suffer from this sense of guilt and anxiety, but I console myself by thinking that even writing is doing something. If I can write this article as an act of faith, giving my time and talent to a good cause, perhaps it may benefit both myself and my readers. Without this spirit of self-inquiry and self-giving, I know full well that this article itself will be wasteful and useless.

This, then, is my first lesson and I do hope I have learnt it well. The rest of the essay will focus on the other lessons learned from specific enounters with Swadhyaya.

Swadhyayis decorate their doorway with ***rangoli*** *before setting out on a Swadhyaya mission.*

It became clear to me that reducing Swadhyaya to a topic of academic debate was futile and counter-productive.

The Rajendra Bhavan Discussion

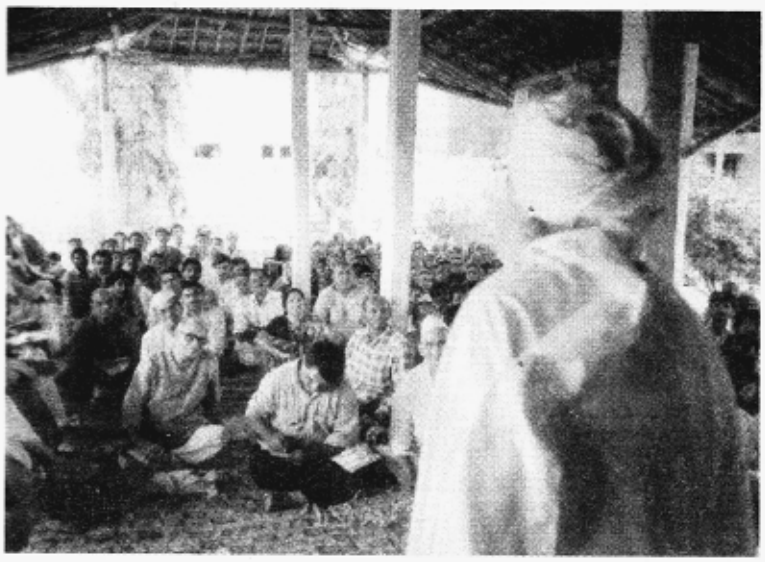
What impressed me most that day was Dr. Gopal Krishna's brief presentation. Here was a man steeped in western traditions, educated abroad, living in Oxford, a self-confessed agnostic, who was finally admitting that using one's native cultural resources was the only way to bring about social change. When it comes to the most important job of self-recovery and self-renewal, scientific, secular and rationalistic modernity offers no answers. Their psychology may concede other levels, such as the emotional, the intellectual, even the unconscious, but what about the spiritual? In foregrounding the spiritual, Swadhyaya is nothing but a process of self-acknowledgement.

The problem with the intellectual class is that it looks upon all relationships in terms of power. But the renewal of India needs all kinds of people—farmers, shopkeepers, carpenters, fisherfolk, sweepers, vegetable sellers, domestic servants, daily wage earners, blue collar workers—and the intellectuals, the masters of the word. That which binds all these by a common thread of self-renewal is Swadhyaya. Where political processes fail and Swadhyaya succeeds, is while the former concentrate on external changes, while the latter brings about inner transformation. What human beings need are dignity and recognition which can come only from genuine mutuality and caring, not from some political programmes of social justice.

The Kurukshetra Trip

Never in my life had I seen such a large group of people assembled for a spiritual cause, having never been to the Kumbh Mela or even a very large political rally. But here, from near the dias, one saw an undividided and unhindered sea of humanity. What was more, they were completely disciplined. Close to one lakh people had come on their own, spending their own money, paying for their own tickets. There was a carnivalesque atmosphere. The efficiency levels of Swadhyaya are stupendous, as indeed I was to perceive time and time again. The people in charge are superb managers. The whole task force consists of volunteers, so there is no motivation problem. Communication systems are incredibly effective; the speed with which orders are conveyed and obeyed is amazing. Management schools ought to teach the Swadhyaya method of cooperation. The way the Prayog Darshan was organised only confirmed my initial observation. Efficiency, moreover, enhances pride and self-esteem especially in an otherwise totally inefficient system like ours.

On the way back, sitting in the bus with Professor Narayan Seth, former Director of the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, I suddenly



Maulana Wahiuddin at the Amritalayam, Kajli village

understood how the great social movements in the past—things that I had merely known from books—must have worked. My life would have been so much the poorer if I hadn't witnessed the magic of Swadhyaya in action. I realised that we can still save ourselves. All my life, I had thought that the time for great things had passed. I had thought that enlightenment could only be found within. But now I know that I could also turn it outward, bringing people together, creating a new social order.

The Prayog Darshan: Arrival

It was raining when we reached Ahmedabad. There was practically no transport available. But the Swadhyayis were well prepared. Several cars and jeeps had lined up waiting for us. We were shepherded through the dark and wet streets of Ahmedabad to a comfortable country club. I was impressed by the unfailing courtesy and cordiality of the volunteers. Later, we were taken to one of our hosts' houses for dinner. The whole family looked after us, including the children. Swadhyaya, I observed, knits families together.

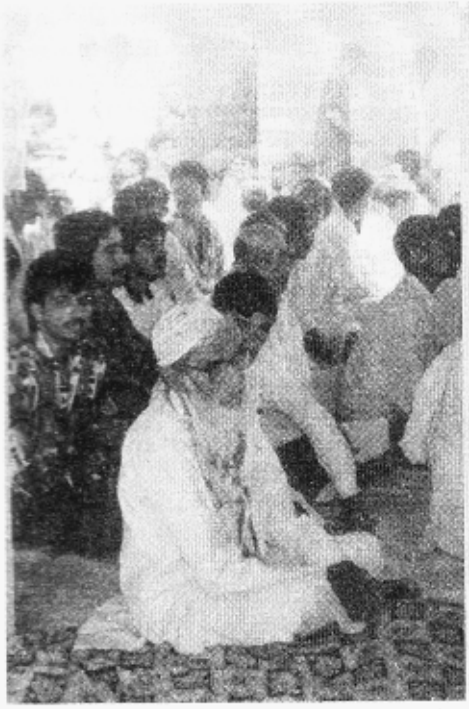
***Bhavlakshis* and Others**

The next morning, we went to Ramdev Pura, a *chawl* near Jawahar Chowk. This was a Bhangi settlement. Bhangis are the outcastes among outcastes. In Swadhyayi parlance, they are not known as harijans but as *bhavlakshis*—'those who wish to be esteemed'.

We sat together in Ramesh Bhai's house before re-assembling at their community centre. The house was clean, full of shining brass utensils. His old father nearly had tears in his eyes as Samdhong Rinpoche, a senior Buddhist Lama, Head of the Tibetan Parliment in Exile and Director of the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, stepped into his home. It was the miracle of Swadhyaya that had brought all these distinguished people to his home. We then heard what was to become a familiar refrain. Before Swadhyaya, this used to be like most other untouchable colonies—filthy, impoverished, neglected; the residents had low self-esteem; drinking, gambling and wife-beating were rampant and very few children went to school. Though the reservation policy had ensured jobs for some, terrible social discrimination and contempt were rife. After Swadhyaya everything changed. The drinking and wife-beating stopped as did the petty quarrels. Marriage customs were reformed and expensive superstitions abandoned. Children started going to school; houses became clean and tidy and every child in the *basti* learned Sanskrit *shlokas*. Ramesh Bhai said that after becoming Swadhyayis all of them began getting a lot of respect. The *savarna* (upper-caste) Swadhyayis visited their homes and invited them to their own. It is this attention, caring, and respect that had re-integrated them into society. For the first time in my life I heard a man call himself a *bhangi* (scavenger) with unselfconscious pride. 'I am a *bhangi*, but I also do the work of a Brahmin. A Brahmin is one who spreads knowledge, good *sanskars*, so I too am a Brahmin. I go on *bhakti pheris* to spread the liberating message of Swadhyaya. So I am a Bhangi-Brahmin'. Swadhyayis feel that change should come voluntarily. They feel that reservations, though necessary, are not enough. It is only in Swadhyaya that I saw the solution to one of our most intractable problems—the continued oppression of Dalits and counter-casteism unleashed in their name by politicians. Both extremes mirror each other, both divide society and threaten to rend the national fabric. Only in Swadhyaya did I see a *bhangi* without the least trace of an inferiority complex, calling himself as such. Only in Swadhyaya did I see a Dalit assert that he was a Brahmin. Only in Swadhyaya did I see a scheduled-caste man declaring that he no longer needed reservations. Only Swadhyaya can help us preserve our cultural diversity without giving up our desire for upward mobility. The cultural traditions of an untouchable enrich our society as much as that of a Brahmin. Such, after all, was Gandhi's idea of varna—diversity, occupational security and self-respect, without stratification or inequality. In fact, in Swadhyaya we see a combination of the Ambedkarite drive for self-respect combined with a Gandhian consideration and compassion even for one's oppressors.

Similar was our experience in a Vaghri village on the outskirts of Ahmedabad. The Vaghris or *Devi-Pujaks* are another despised tribe of India. Ranjit Bhai of Jawahar Nagar summed up the impact of Swadhyaya, 'Earlier we were like animals living outside the village, drinking, fighting, cursing, but now we are flowing in the current of *prem bhav*. Today, far from being a nuisance to society, we have become its leaders and sustainers.' Similarly later, in Veraval, in a fisher-folk community, we again witnessed a self-reliant, proud society in the process of being built.

The empowerment that comes with Swadhyaya is not external. It is not brought about by economic or social props. It is not based on doles and subsidies given by the government. Swadhyaya transforms a person's self-concept—from seeing himself or herself as helpless and weak to self-sufficient and strong. People who could



The Amritalayam at Kajli village, Saurashtra zila parishad

When the Ramjanmabhoomi supporters came to this village to collect money and volunteers, they were politely told that the villagers would build a Ram temple and a mosque in the village itself. They saw no need to get involved in a temple–mosque conflict far away.

not read or write, today recite Vedic hymns. In Kajli village, near Veraval, we saw how Swadhyaya had tackled another intractable problems of communal conflict. This village had 250 harijan families, 100 Muslim families, and 100 Karari Rajput families, all living in harmony. This village was an 'Amritalayam', which meant that more than 80 per cent of its inhabitants were Swadhyayis. The secret of their communal harmony was, we discovered, not just Vinoba's message of *sarva dharma samabhav*, but *sarva dharma sweekar*—the acceptance of all faiths. When the Ramjanmabhoomi supporters came to this village to collect money and volunteers, they were politely told that the villagers would build a Ram temple and a mosque in the village itself. They saw no need to get involved in a temple–mosque conflict far away. Salim Bhai, Secretary of the Muslim *jamaat*, offered his views on how to ensure peace and amity between the two communities—'No conversion, mutual respect, tolerance and the Loknath Amritalayam, where people of all faiths can gather together'. The Muslims of Kajli had openly accepted that Hindus, unlike them, would worship idols, but that did not mean that they were non-believers or *kafirs*.

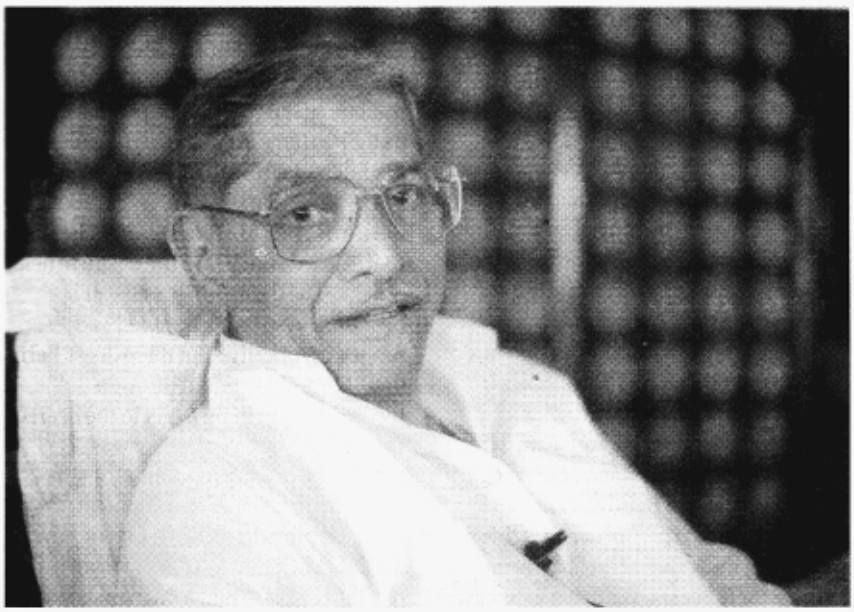
Maulana Wahiduddin got up to speak at the end of this session. He said that Swadhyaya was the hope for the new India, an India whose foundations had been laid by the freedom struggle, but whose promise had been belied by post-independence developments. He worshipped in the mosque at Kajli, while many of us, heads covered, watched silently. Later (and what astounded us) was how the Maulana did his *namaz* in one of the Swadhyayi temples during our tour. True, he did not face the photographs of the Hindu gods, but faced Mecca like a true Muslim; yet this was the first time I had ever seen a Muslim praying in a Hindu house of worship. A miracle! Now, whenever I'm told that Muslims are fanatical and intolerant, I would contradict that with what I had seen with my own eyes.

Not only has Swadhyaya succeeded in empowering Dalits and tackled the so-called 'minority' problem, it has also raised the status of women. I felt this most keenly at Shanti Para, a village in Saurashtra. At the Amritalayam, in front of over 500 people, Rudi Ben, an illiterate, rustic woman testified to the extent of her empowerment and emancipation, explaining clearly and fearlessly, how Swadhyaya had changed her life, reformed her family. Earlier, these women were more or less confined to the house and never educated. After Swadhyaya, they have become community leaders, with an equal voice in determining how they want to run their lives. As Rudi Ben summed it up, *'Swadhyaya nahin, to gaurav nahin'*—'there is no respect without Swadhyaya'.

True, Swadhyaya is not like western feminism or its *desi* versions. It preaches neither the equality of women nor the upliftment of women per se. Rather, it emphasises the value of co-operation in every family and community. There are special programmes for women which raise their consciousness without being problem or issue based. The status of women has not only risen greatly within the family and in society, but women also go out on *bhakti pheris*. They accompany their husbands in most of the important activities. They have learned not only to read and write, but also to teach and spread the message of Swadhyaya.

Dowry has been eradicated in Swadhyayi families. Mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law have learned not just to coexist, but to love and support each other. These changes have come about through innovative programmes such as *saas-bahu ka milan* or *sakhi milan*. Swadhyaya builds up communities by idealising and revitalising relationships.

Swadhyaya has succeeded not only in empowering Dalits, minorities and women, but helped rebuild entire communities. Shanti Para was an ideal example. It seemed like heaven—a self-reliant, highly enlightened village, made up of upright, responsible, and caring individuals. This village, plagued by politics earlier, now did not even need elections. The leader was chosen by common consent. The man in question told us that it was with great reluctance that he had accepted the charge of *sarpanch*. He knew it would be a thankless job, but had agreed only out of a sense of serving the community. How did the change in him come about? He said that when Krishna (God) was his *hriday samrat* (the emperor of his heart), he felt no need to seek power. After all, we seek external recognition only when we feel impoverished inside. In fact, the *trikal sandhya*, the triurnal prayer of the Swadhyayis, is based precisely on such a notion of self-renewal. There was no poverty in this village. Health-care standards were quite high. After



Swadhyaya, the village had been cleaned up and open drains sealed. Malaria was nearly eradicated. The local doctor spoke of how impressed he was with the community spirit. Consequently, he himself became a Swadhyayi. Wells were recharged and water bodies repaired. Nearly every house had a soak-pit. When a cyclone devastated the power lines, the villagers themselves put up the poles and wires, merely requesting the Electricity Board to switch the current on. This was the kind of village in which a farmer would have an M.A. in Philosophy. The villagers not only planted over 16,000 trees but also nurtured them. Shanti Para had a *gorus kendra*, another brilliant idea of Dadaji's, whereby the farmer sold his milk to a co-operative in the village from which all the villagers could get pure and unadulterated milk. This enhanced the status of the cow, which was earlier thought of merely as a source of money and thus tortured. The profit from the centre was considered the *prasad* of God. Such a village, to my mind, was exactly what Gandhi's vision of *gram swaraj* might have been. Shanti Para is perhaps more urban and modern than Gandhi imagined an Indian village to be, but it is close to the kind of ideal self-sufficient and self-sustaining community that he envisaged.

Notable Swadhyayi Experiments: Bhav Nirjhar

Located in a spacious campus on the outskirts of Ahmedabad, Bhav Nirjhar was an educational institution with a difference. Here, boys from reasonably well-off rural families were trained to become farmer-philosophers. They come here after their schooling in Swadhyayi institutions, and after 'graduation', return to their villages. No degrees are awarded. With one stroke, the whole lure of 'salaried' jobs in the city has been eliminated as was the problem of the drain of human resources from our villages. Dadaji began these institutions to create people who were not slaves of degrees and diplomas, but people whose useful and relevant education. In other words, a radical break from the competitive, examination-oriented, colonial education system in which we are all trapped. All the ills of this present system—false disciplinary hierarchies, the soul-denying, culturally alienating kinds of knowledge, obsession with marks and grades, cheating and copying, tutorial colleges, tuitions, and so on—have been bypassed in this alternative system. Here students get a rounded, integrated, vocational education. Besides training in agricultural sciences and cottage industries, they are also taught yoga and philosophy. The emphasis is more on *sanskar* than *shiksha*. Those who wish to study further can go to the Tatvajnana Vidyapeeth in Thane, where Dadaji himself supervises the teaching of comparative philosophy, Indian culture and civilisation, and other such subjects.

Yogeshwar Krishi, Shri Darshanam, Vruksh Mandir

All these are ways of creating *apaurushiya Lakshmi* or impersonal wealth. Co-operative farming in which volunteers from one or several villages participate, not as farmers, but as *pujaris* or worshippers, helps create wealth which belongs to the community. This wealth is then used to support the needy, yet it is not seen as charity or dole. It is the *prasad* of the worshipful work of the whole community and can therefore be given and accepted in a manner as impersonal as that in which it was created. Yogeshwar Krishi is confined to one village; Shri Darshanam is the combined effort of 15 to 20 villages; and a Vruksh Mandir involves an even greater number. The sizes of the communes vary, ranging from two or three acres in a Yogeshwar Krishi, to dozens of acres in Shri Darshanams and Vruksh Mandirs. The idea behind these experiments is not just to produce wealth and profits; in fact, at the Vruksh Mandir near Rajkot, we were told that the costs almost equal the proceeds. The main purpose behind these schemes is to bring people together. Several families work on these farms turn by turn. There are spin-offs like the *gaon milans*, in which entire villages visit each other. The same idea of creating impersonal wealth and building communities informs projects like the Matsya Gandha. Here, instead of community farming we have community fishing. Likewise, there are community vegetable carts, where the same concept of co-operative volunteerism is employed. Other experiments include the sustained redressal of ecological damage. Dadaji's emphasis on *rishi krishi* or 'divine farming' reflects the urgency of eco-friendly means for self-sustainance.

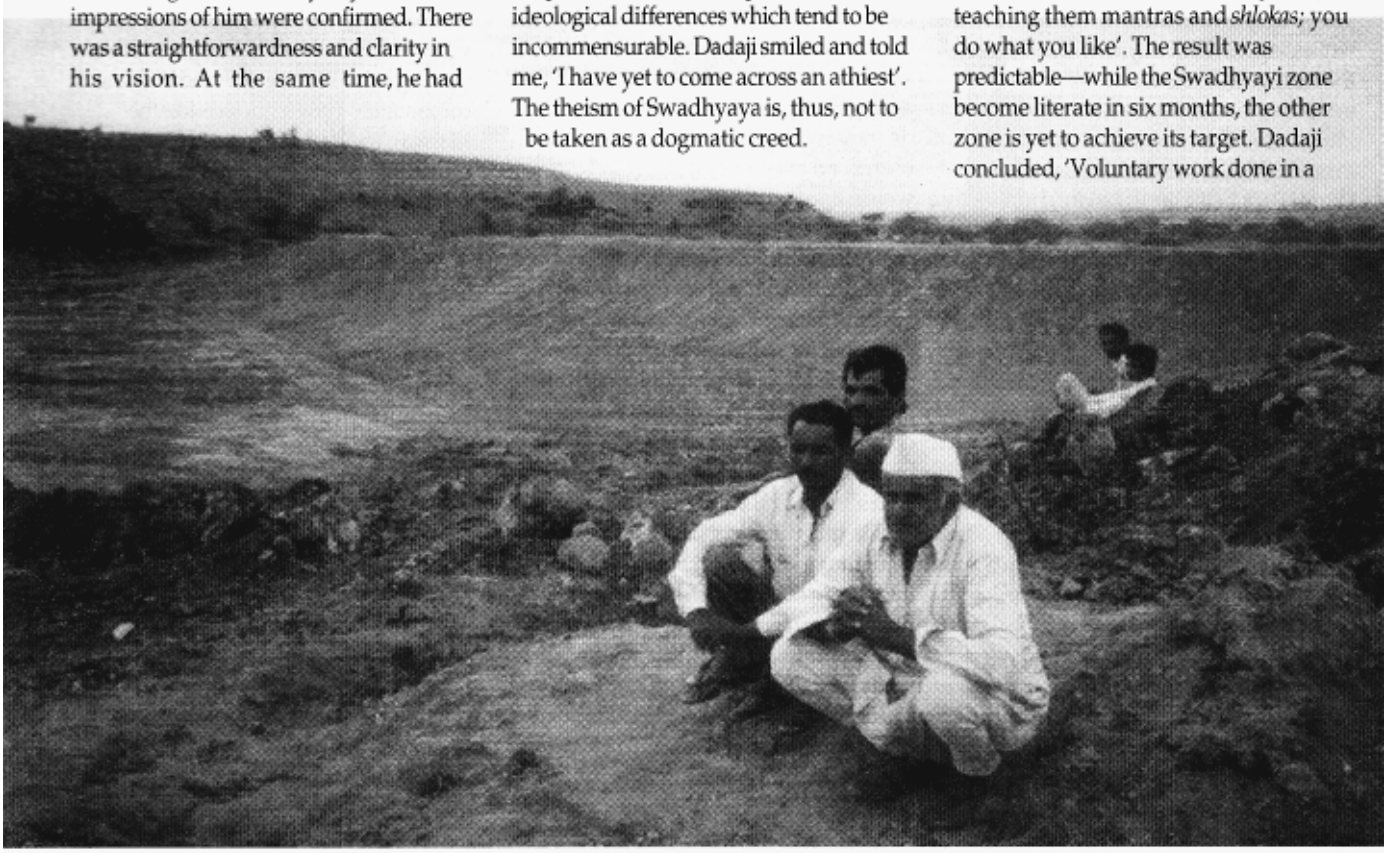
Dadaji

The greatest up-lifting moment during the Kurukshetra trip had been Dadaji's *pravachan*. He had just come out of a heart surgery; it had been touch and go for days. He was speaking against the doctors' advice. He said, 'How could I not come to meet you and talk to you after all the trouble you have taken to assemble here from distant parts of the country?' What was the gist of Dadaji's talk? It was very inspiring, no doubt, but what I remember most is how Dadaji had interpreted the

message of the *Gita*. He said, 'In the *Gita*, the Lord has assured us that he is always with us, within us, to guide us, to help us live our lives. He will never let his *bhakta* down. This is a promise. God always keeps his promises'. What power those words had ! They entered right into my soul, giving me a great sense of confidence and peace. He continued, 'What does the *Gita* say? It says, "Stand up and fight. Don't give up. Do. Act. Don't despair. You are not alone. I am with you. Come on, face life"'. Dadaji taught me that the *Gita* is not just an abstruse or esoteric philosophical text, but an assurance of help and hope. It preaches a positive, affirmative attitude to life. It uplifts and encourages. Later, we met Dadaji briefly. He greeted us as if he knew each of us individually. When someone said something to him, he listened with genuine interest and attention. I had seen that unhurried self-confidence before, but not that sense of curiosity. He seemed to be interested in each one of us personally. Here was a man who actually saw divinity in all of us. The simplicity and sureness of this attitude were totally disarming. When we met him again in Bombay, my earlier impressions of him were confirmed. There was a straightforwardness and clarity in his vision. At the same time, he had a sharp grasp of human nature and the ability to avoid useless discussions. The man we saw before us was certainly not at the peak of his powers. His movements were slow and speech slurred. He was also wont to forget names, even those of his close associates. Yet, he had by no means given up. On the contrary, though his greatest acheivements were now behind him, he still had the ability to plan ahead, to dream.

When we gathered around him in a group, the Rev. Samdhong Rinpoche spoke. 'I cannot consider myself a Swadhyayi,' he said, 'though I am in full sympathy with its aims and objectives. This is because as a Buddhist I do not believe in God. Yet, I believe that this is the kind of movement that I had been looking for for years. We believe that the world will be saved if India, the *arya bhoomi*, provides spiritual leadership. I had almost despaired of finding something like Swadhyaya which has the capacity to raise a new society on the basis of our ancient spiritual principles. Now that I have found it, I wish it every success'. The next day, after his lecture, I asked Dadaji to comment onwhat the Rinpoche had said. We spoke of other ideological differences which tend to be incommensurable. Dadaji smiled and told me, 'I have yet to come across an athiest'. The theism of Swadhyaya is, thus, not to be taken as a dogmatic creed. Swadhyaya is for anyone who believes in human brotherhood and a higher cosmic law. But the spirit of Swadhyaya does militate against the modern notion of man as the supreme arbiter of his own destiny. Dadaji had stressed *niswarth prem* or selfless love. I asked him, 'What about the desire or wish to attain *moksha*? Isn't that also a desire? And the desire to help others? The desire not to have any desire? And so on?' He smiled and replied cryptically, 'But these don't harm you'. Once again he cut through theoretical quibbling to get to the heart of the matter. Dadaji's altruism was, ultimately, only a programme of self-realisation and inner development.

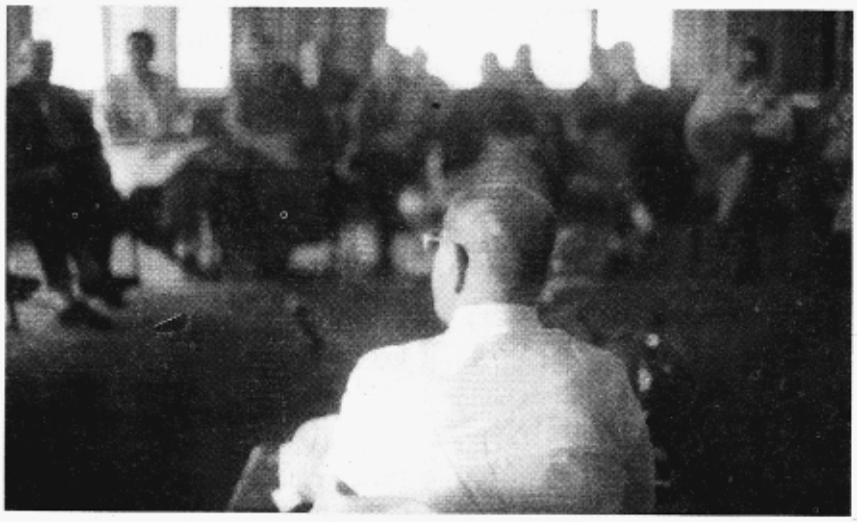
Changing the topic, he told us how the District Commissioner of Rajkot had once appealed to him to help make the district
100 per cent literate. Dadaji told him, 'This is your job; we have nothing to do with such missions. But, yes, now that you've asked me to help you, I will. Let's divide the district into two zones. You take one, we'll take the other. It's your responsibility to make everyone literate in your zone and it's ours in our zone. But note, we'll make them literate by teaching them mantras and *shlokas;* you do what you like'. The result was predictable—while the Swadhyayi zone become literate in six months, the other zone is yet to achieve its target. Dadaji concluded, 'Voluntary work done in a



The Nirmal Neer Scheme at Virpur village, Saurashtra. Villagers built the dam through shramdaan without any government help.

spirit of worship is far more effective than all sorts of expensive government schemes. Material incentives do not encourage us. Instead, they corrupt and enfeeble us. They make us lazy and dishonest'. He was critical of those who mixed religion with politics. 'We don't allow politics to enter into Swadhyaya. Those who wish to capture power should be honest about it. Why pretend that they are working for *dharma* ?'

Behind the entire locomotion of Swadhyaya is the engine that is Dadaji. Dadaji, to use Buddhist terminology, is a Bodhisattva, a self-realised being who takes birth to alleviate the sorrows of others. Even if one does not believe in such divinely ordained births, simple facts of heredity and environment bear this out. Dadaji's father, too, was a religious teacher, a *pravachan-kar*. It was



he who had started the Gita Pathashala in Madhav Bagh in 1928. He idealised his own vocation and became a figure of inspiration to society. What that means is that each of us must idealise our lives, our professions, our multiple roles. To restore India, we must, each of us, do our own job properly. This is Dadaji's most basic lesson. The other lessons are equally important. Never give up, be patient. To bring any lasting change one has to work silently for three generations. Therefore, work to improve your inner reality, the appearance will take care of itself ... I believe that Dadaji is a spiritual genius. That is because he has given us a new mantra, a mantra best suited for post-independence India. He has given a new meaning to *bhakti*. A *bhakt* is someone who is not *vibhakt*, that is someone who is not separated from himself and his fellow human beings. Showing gratitude to God is not necessarily to offer flowers, but offering one's time and talent to a 'godly' cause. Anything done with a pure heart and which you do not for personal gain but for the benefit of others is a godly cause. Anything done for one's spiritual development through the service of others is *bhakti*. The whole edifice of Swadhyaya is built on this deceptively simple premise. Today, over 3 lakh volunteers fanning outwards, going from village to village, town to town on their *bhakti pheri* or devotional tour, bringing the message of brother and sisterhood to every home in India. All their great achievements—experiments in community making and community wealth, recharging wells, rebuilding tanks, alternative education and farming, social reform and social upliftment—all these have been born out of this simple idea of the *bhakti pheri*. The man who is the author of this novel idea, Dadaji, *has* to be a genius.

What Makes Swadhyaya Work?

This is a question I have often asked myself, especially when confronted with the living proof of the tremendous transformation that it has wrought on the lives of its practitioners. What makes a rich industrialist from Bombay give up all his comforts, sacrifice so much time and money, only to visit some distant village which lacks even a flush toilet? Whatmakes a poor *beedi* maker from Andhra Pradesh save for six months in order to afford the ticket to go on a *bhakti pheri* in Haryana? One can, indeed, understand why certain individuals might be attracted to Swadhyaya, but how does it succeed at the community level? What is the secret of this miracle? I think the answer is that this is how the Indian villages must have been traditionally conceived of—a kind of ideal sub-system. In other words, Swadhyaya does not impose anything new but merely idealises and realises the potential of what already is. Swadhyaya works because of the unique spiritual genius and authority of Dadaji, the utter dedication and sincerity of its workers, the extraordinary organisational and enterpreneural skills of its managers and innovative planning and vision. But also because it offers a holistic and total approach to the needs of its practitioners, nourishing their physical, vital, mental, and spiritual being. Swadhyaya works because it is practical and pragmatic, not unrealistic and otherworldly. It does not make impossible or unreasonable demands. The extent of the involvement is left entirely to each individual. Its structure may be hierarchical, but it is totally egalitarian in its approach to problem-solving. The changes brought about by it are gradual and self-motivated, not sudden and externally imposed. Swadhyaya provides a meaningful orientation to life based on our own cultural patterns and resources. Ultimately, what makes Swadhyaya work is the yearning within each of us to improve our lives and to contribute our mite to the betterment of the world. Each of us has this desire, but doesn't know the way to its fructification. Swadhyaya shows the way.

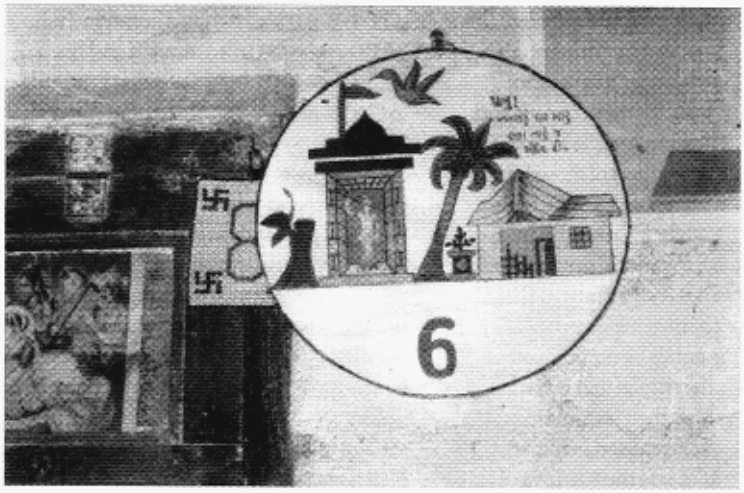
'Voluntary work done in a spirit of worship is far more effective than all sorts of expensive government schemes. Material incentives do not encourage us. Instead, they corrupt and enfeeble us.'—

Dadaji

Critiquing Swadhyaya

It is considered both the duty and pastime of academics today to mount an attack on anything that smacks of tradition. That is not my intention in this brief section. Indeed, I don't even think that mere scholars and academicians, those who have done little to understand or better the society they live in, even have the right to criticise a genuine, far-reaching, and transformative movement like Swadhyaya. However, if some of our observations can be of help, they should be offered in a spirit of friendship and humility. This is the spirit in which I make the following remarks. First of all, it seems to me that Swadhyaya has much in common with evangelical movements. It offers tremendous emotional and intellectual security to its adherents. It involves a conversion, albeit slow and non-violent, a change of lifestyle and attitude, public confessions of previous wrong-doing, plus unlimited opportunities for further proseletysing. I am aware that my choice of words may be seen as unfair or unfortunate, so I must hasten to add that Swadhyaya is not at all narrow-minded, fanatical, oppositional, cultish, or even violent like many evangelical movements. Yet, one cannot get away from the fact that most of its energy is horizontal, not vertical. In other words, once a person becomes a Swadhyayi, the next thing for him or her to do is to spread the message amongst people who haven't heard of it. *Bhakti pheri* is thus the best possible method of broadcasting the Swadhyayi creed.

Another question that arises is, 'what after Dadaji?' Dadaji himself believes that whatever has to happen in the future will happen, why worry oneself about it? Why not do what is our nearest task instead? Truly, it does not matter if the movement declines like several such movements have in the past. Something else will emerge. Society is never static. There are tendencies latent in it which can either uplift it or cause its downfall. Swadhyaya uplifts. Swadhyaya does derive its strength from the ideas and inspiration of one individual; this must be understood and acknowledged. His photograph is found in all the Swadhyayi temples along with those of Yogeshwar Krishna, Amba, Parvati, and Shiva. Whether or not his adopted daughter, known as 'Didiji', will be an able successor, only time will tell. Finally, I must admit that though what I have heard and seen during my entire experience of Swadhyaya has been very inspiring and encouraging, I feel as if my soul is thirsting for something more, if not something else. That is, I was and remain a supporter of Swadhyaya, yet I still thirst for something more. This latter point is very personal. It does not mean that I find Swadhyaya inadequate, but that I know that what I need and crave for cannot be found outside myself and that to seek it I must not only go within, but stop expecting anyone else to give it to me. In a way, this realisation might be taken as the culmination of Dadaji's idea of strengthening oneself. The ultimate point of any self-culture is moral and spiritual perfection which comes only from personal endeavour, not from any external guidance and methods. I myself am the problem and I myself am the solution. If so, whether or not I participate in Dadaji's Swadhyaya is not as important as whether or not I undertake my own, utterly uncompromising and dedicated *swadhyaya*. Swadhyaya is but a path, a direction. It cannot liberate me, unless I must walk the path, undertake the journey myself. Swadhyaya may help me, but I must help myself. To those who are walking on the path, Swadhyaya is thus the beginning, not the end of the road.



Colourful date cards remind swadhyayis about their appointed day of voluntary work.

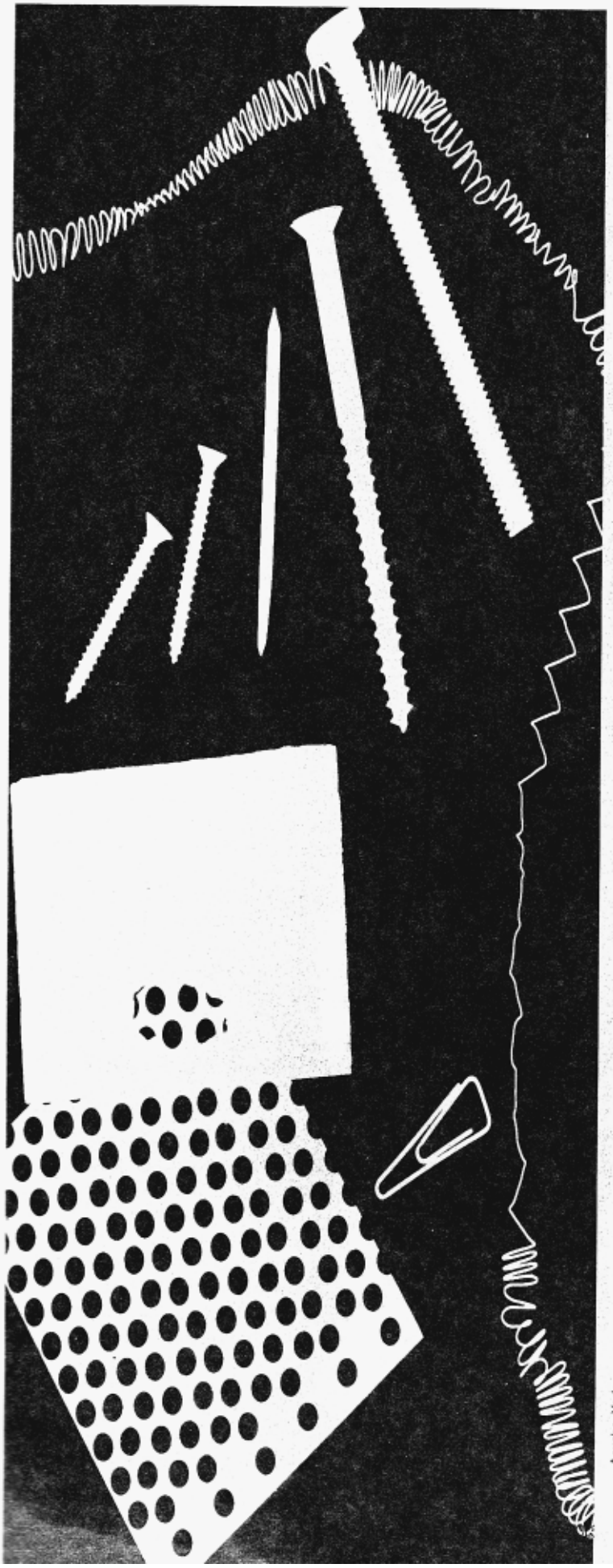
Swadhyaya works because it is practical and pragmatic, not unrealistic and other-worldly. It does not make impossible or unreasonable demands. The extent of the involvement is left entirely to each individual.

Bibliographical Note

The secondary material on Swadhyaya is not very extensive. Much of it consists of newpaper reports, personal accounts, and travelogues. Most of it has been collated by Rajiv Vohra in the Swadhyaya Special Issue of the *Hindi Gandhi Marg* (March-April 1996). The July-August 1996 issue also has some interesting discussions arising out of the response to the Special Issue. In contrast, there is a considerable body of primary material published by the movement itself. This includes transcripts of Dadaji's *pravachans* and several books on Indian traditions. Available in Marathi, Gujarati, Hindi, and English, this material can be ordered from Sat Vichar Darshan, Nirmal Niketan, 2, Dr. Bhajekar Lane, Mumbai - 400004.

One of India's leading poets, **Dr. Makarand Paranjape,** has published widely in areas of criticism, fiction and translation. He was awarded the Homi Bhabha Fellowship for Literature in 1991. He is Associate Professor, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology, New Delhi.

Photos: **Anupam Mishra**, Gandhi Peace Foundation



Anusha Yadav

RECOVERING TECHNOLOGY FROM VIOLENCE

SHAMBU PRASAD
AND
UZRAMMA

When we speak of violence in this century, the most violent ever, we think of Hiroshima, Auschwitz, maybe even Bhopal, as examples of the excesses of technology. But the violence in our daily lives would arguably outnumber those disasters. The violence of much of technology is commonplace and not restricted to events alone.

Twenty-five year-old Nellutla Ravi committed suicide in December 1997. He was one of the many small cotton farmers in the Warangal district of Andhra Pradesh whose repeated attempts at pest control only resulted in depleting their savings. Ravi's case is perhaps symptomatic of the violence that technology can engender. He was probably motivated by the success of big farmers who were able to make huge profits by opting for hybrid varieties and cash crops. He bought seeds from multinational companies and took loans from moneylenders for pesticides. But most importantly, Ravi believed the dealer that spraying pesticides would take care of the pest problem. Little did he realise that the pests had become resistant and that he was about to be sucked into a vicious cycle where he would try to solve the pesticide problem through more of the same. People's memories can be treacherously short; Ravi was probably too young to have heard stories of farmers in the Prakasam district a decade ago, who had met with the same fate.

A generation or two back, farmers would have grown cotton from traditional seed varieties that were hardy and pest resistant. Their

Courtesy: *The Hindu*

Ravi's tragedy is seen as a problem of credit and faulty agricultural information and not as the result of a faulty technological choice.

The family of a cotton farmer who committed suicide in Warangal district Andhra Pradesh… distress deaths

yields may have been low but they would have coped with this adversity since their dependence on the market and capital risks were also low. Farmers committing suicide was unthinkable. Today agriculture, unlike before, is no more a craft and the farmer is but a tool in the vast production machine where technologies are determined in laboratories and by markets far removed from farming communities. Ravi's tragedy is seen as a problem of credit and faulty agricultural information and *not* as the result of a faulty technological choice. That Ravi tried using more pesticides to solve the problem reflects a certain mindset that technological problems can be solved through more technology.

Violence in Everyday Life

This summer when we buy a cotton shirt, we would most probably not reflect on how cotton in recent times has become an unsustainable crop, accounting for more than half the pesticides used in India. Technology has separated consumers from producers so much so, that as end users of the outcomes of technological progress, we are unaware of the various intermediate stages that a product goes through and the violence that its production often causes.

To follow the connection between technological choices and violence, we simply need to trace anything we use to its source. Take the case of the flush toilet, a sanitation system designed on the premise that the solution to pollution is dilution. The result? Enormous quantities of water required for a city like Delhi that makes a case for the Tehri Dam and an unmanageable disposal problem that has resulted in the death of all rivers and streams around Delhi. The same could be applied to high electricity consumption and so we see why people protest against the Maheswar Dam or an Enron.

When we speak of violence in this century, the most violent ever, we think of Hiroshima, Auschwitz, maybe even Bhopal, as examples of the excesses of technology. But uninformed and helpless consumers that we are, the violence in our daily lives would arguably outnumber those disasters. The violence of much of technology today is commonplace and not restricted to events alone. The histories of this violence would need a lot of unravelling and discovering—the subtler forms of violence, social formations, different ways of living, aesthetics, the body and the mind.

Technology today, located in the urban habitat, with its high energy, high capital bias, favours a certain type of social organisation, i.e., a few concentrated centres and large hinterland. It has exacerbated social division in society and promoted a particular way of living. The destruction of diverse life forms and ways of living is replaced by superficial choices between fifty brands of toothpastes. All this raises several questions.

Has there been no violence in history? What is the philosophical basis of this violence? Is technology value-free and universally applicable or can different cultures see technology differently? What is technology's relationship to the mind and body and how has it changed over the years? How have commercial interests shaped technology and habitats? How have some relationships like the market and technology strengthened, and others like craft and technology, producer and consumer, weakened over time? Is violence inherent to technological progress or are there possibilities of growth that technology can engender that are non-violent and harmonious? Are there recent historical instances where the so called inevitable march of history changed tracks? What are the possible bases of a non-violent technology? How did Gandhi understand technology? These are some questions to be kept in mind while discussing the technology-violence relationship.

Violence in History

Lewis Mumford, noted historian of technology, wondered in his *Myth of the Machine*, if the association of inordinate power and productivity with equally inordinate violence and destruction was purely accidental. Clearly not, given mankind's experiences in this century. For many of us in the 'two-thirds world', there is a distinct correlation between rapid industrialisation in the West and de-industrialisation and destitution of the colonies. Technological disasters have been too frequent for us to assume that they were caused due to *errors* in implementation. The *plan* is more at fault.

While it is true that there has always been human violence, it is also true that it has been

Do we perceive the relationship between a simple cotton shirt and violence? The violence of technology is not restricted to events alone.

limited by the meagre physical resources at the disposal of the powerful. They were forced to rely on manpower alone to exercise control and so violence was confined to a human scale that was open to attack from without and corruption from within. What distinguishes the violence of the present from that of earlier days, is the limitlessness of it and the magic cloak of invisibility that it wears because its source is not easily traced.

Heightened technical change in recent times has gone hand in hand with the collective power of a few who are the custodians of information and knowledge. Science (a relatively autonomous sphere), became an arm of the state since World War I. Ravi the farmer's loss of autonomy was preceded historically by the intelligentsia's loss of autonomy. The violence of the bomb was possible due to a greater violence in the mind, through legally sanctioned experiments in nuclear, bacterial and chemical genocide protected by secrecy, and systematic misinformation by nation states. It is this military–bureaucracy–commerce nexus that eventually became responsible for several technologies in the post-war era. Ravi was to be a victim of one such that had its history in violence.

In our search for non-violent technologies it is precisely this loss of autonomy that one needs to take cognizance of. A non-violent technology should be able to recover the sense of person that the farmer and the scientist have lost. The strong influence of agri-business interests over research directions has placed the health of the soil and the farmer secondary to productivity concerns. The scientist's loss of autonomy has resulted in insensitivity to the 'death harvests' of Prakasam and now Warangal.

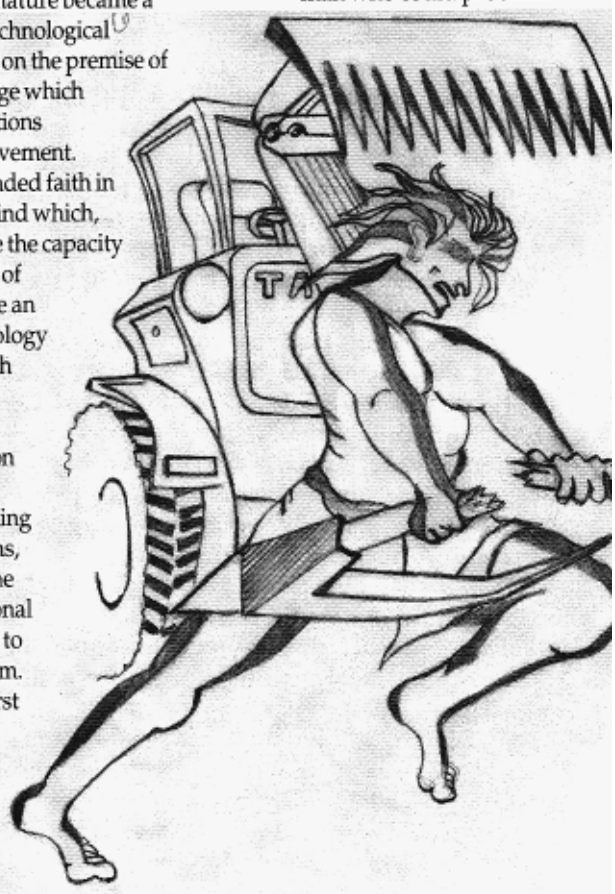
The fundamental basis on which this loss of autonomy rests, lies in the way man relates to his world. Traditional societies, whether in snowbound lands, alluvial plains, or the desert, developed technologies of living with nature that answered their respective needs. However, with the coming of the modern age in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, European thinkers felt this symbiotic relationship of technology and nature to be a hindrance to the development of human beings and the mastery of nature became a prerequisite of progress. Technological progress proceeded, based on the premise of unlimited human knowledge which would create human inventions capable of perpetual improvement. The new spirit had unbounded faith in the power of the human mind which, according to it, would have the capacity of solving all the problems of existence. And so it became an axiom that the ills of technology would be mitigated through further developments in technology.

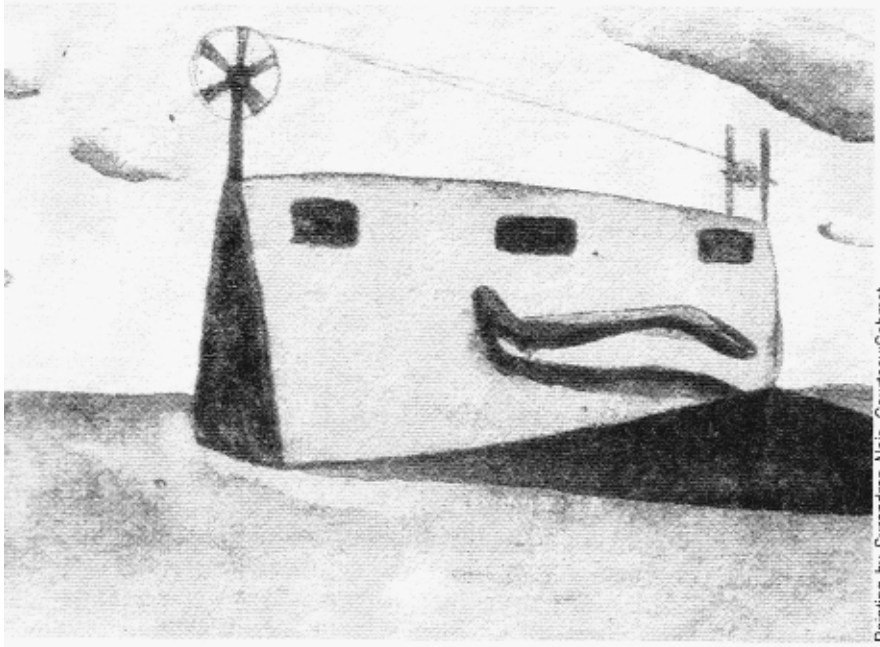
Modern technology soon assumed a universal and monolithic character, claiming to be valid for all conditions, relegating at one stroke, the myriad practices of traditional societies all over the globe to the anthropological museum. The results of this view, first propagated by Europeans and later by segments of the people they colonised, have been cataclysmic. Sophisticated technologies that sustained traditional societies over millennia, adapting and innovating organically, has been replaced in one fell swoop by untried and destructive mechanisms. Can this be reversed? Are there references in recent history where this has occurred?

Recovering Technology from Violence

From the point of view of a thinking person rooted in one of these colonised societies perched on the twenty-first century, choices of technologies calls for a clear articulation of an alternative standpoint, one based on my own culture. The axioms of prevailing knowledge must be examined in the light of its own civilisational experience, and rejected if they don't fit.

Gandhi's views on technology is a case of the contemporary response to technological violence. From his symbol of non-violence, the *charkha*, one can rediscover the lost notions of technology. Here was a man who could proclaim





Painting by Surendran Nair, Courtesy:Sahmat

From his symbol of non-violence, the charkha, one can re-discover the lost notions of technology. Here was a man who could proclaim that non-violence is the only thing that the atom bomb cannot destroy.

that 'non-violence is the only thing that the atom bomb cannot destroy.' He said that 'if India is to evolve along non-violent lines, it will have to decentralise many things. Centralisation cannot be sustained and defended without adequate force.' He sought to replace the link between cities and monster factories with industries and habitats that augured a peaceful existence. For him, the *charkha, swaraj* and ahimsa were intimately connected. *Charkha* was the technological remedy for the victims of technology. Khadi was a technology that stood for revival and regulation. It revived the old art of spinning (thereby linking technology with craft) and regulated the provision and use of machinery by providing it to the poorest (unlike the technology given to Ravi). Gandhi also perceived a relationship between technology and the body. 'A science to be science has to offer the fullest scope for satisfying the hunger of body, mind and soul,' he had once said. The *charkha* would stand for the recovery of that body. He once wryly observed that 'millions cannot keep themselves fit through games and athletics'. The *charkha*, therefore, is representative of a technology which could provide the parameters for non-violent technologies today.

Technology as Human Scale and also as Craft

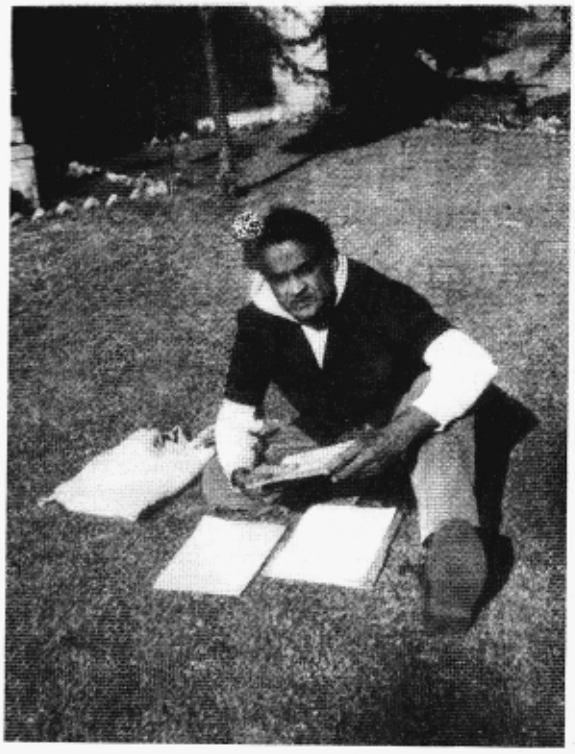
The criterion of good technology is its availability to all and its ability to work without damage to the natural environment. The scale of technology must be compatible with the scale of human understanding, for it is only on a human scale that we are able to make judgements. And finally, it must assist in the development of people's skills. On a human, local scale, technology and aesthetics will not clash. There is no beauty in the finest cloth, if it makes for human suffering, said Kasturba Gandhi, and this can serve as a benchmark for true aesthetics.

The technology of traditional steel-making in Adilabad is a shining example of peaceful technology. Steel-making existed here even during the time of the Great Pyramids of Egypt, for which the stone was said to have been chiselled by tools made of Andhra steel. It was exported during the Middle Ages to Damascus to be made into the famous Damascene swords. This was the famous 'wootz' steel that impressed European travellers of the eighteenth century. Yet, though this industry existed until fifty years ago, there are no mining scars, no environmental damage. We were amazed when we were shown how the ore could be picked up from stream beds like one picks pebbles. The ore was smelted in small furnaces. Steel is being made this way even today in Madhya Pradesh by traditional steel making communities.

Technologies that catered to the 'peoples' industries' of this country depended on local raw materials and are enmeshed with the lives of the people. Communities crystallised around specific technologies, like the bamboo communities of the North-East or the Kunche Erukula of Adilabad, who specialise in making just one product—the brush that is used to spread the starch on the warp of the cotton weavers, made out of the root of the broom grass. Today business and capital are well on the way to eliminating people from the community-technology linkage. For technology to be non-violent, this relationship needs to be re-established.

Take the example of cloth dyes—the materials that we use come from chemical dye factories that poison the soil, air and water. Natural dyes embody the principle of ahimsa. When we were in Tondamnadu in Andhra six years ago, growing indigo, a natural dye, the farmer's wife told us a story. The last time indigo had been grown here was ten years earlier, when chemical fertilisers were just coming into use in agriculture. Three little puppies had wandered into the farmer's shed and ate some of the fertiliser. Two died, but the third staggered over to the indigo vats, drank the indigo liquid and survived. Dyes such as these are often beneficial to the body as opposed to chemical dyes which are carcinogenic.

Technologies that promote the 'artisan mode' serves to enhance rather than replace



C.V. Ranganathan

C.V. Seshadri

the skills of the maker. Technology is the tool and not the master of the user. Unlike the technology of commercial production, the aim of artisanal technology is not to increase production at any cost, but to sustain the ultimate goals of artisan production—of integrating economic activity with a human-scale quality of life. Once empowered, craftspersons themselves can become researchers and developers of technology. In Kalahasti, for example, recent research has resulted in an increased range of *natural* colours for Kalamkari artists, making for newer, more attractive products in the market. Much of this research was done by the artists themselves.

Fortunately, we still have in India, enormous scope for a change of direction of technological intervention. The conditions for this are all in place. We still have significant numbers of producer-communities who retain knowledge systems and the skills of materials handling. Villages, small communities, local markets, though decaying, still exist. Natural resources, though substantially depleted, are still available. All it needs is for the will of the people to make it happen. Our imaginations are sometimes too wanting and limited to devise non-violent alternatives, but the possibilities are there nonetheless. Once, wandering in the jungles of Adilabad with our Devangula host Shankarayya, a *tassar* weaver, we came across the cocoon of a local *tassar* worm. While leaving its cocoon after its metamorphosis into a moth, the worm had not bitten through the filaments of the cocoon in the usual way, but had pushed its way out, leaving the filaments undamaged. Shankarayya explained that it was only the strongest, healthiest insects who could do that. Imagine the possibility of a non-violent *tassar* industry, where instead of killing off 90 per cent of the pupae so that they don't bite their way out of the cocoons, we are able to breed worms strong enough to push through ! Imagine how many billion more eggs from the surviving moths, and therefore how much more *tassar* we would get, if only we had the courage to dream !

The late C. V. Seshadri was one such dreamer who, though a scientist, believed in collecting his ideas from the people and their environment. As a technologist-inventor, he evolved technical parameters that were sensitive to the sufferings of the fisherman or the village woman or farmer. He went further and explored the innate violence and biases inherent in some of the well known laws of science and tried replacing them with indigenous notions that could tilt the balance in favour of the common people of this world. He also believed that for an inventor, his hands do the thinking.

For farmer Ravi to have technologies that are non-violent, he should be a participant in the process of being a farmer-innovator and there should be community scientists like Seshadri for whom the community and not profit was the criterion. It is only by recovering the links between craft and technology, between agriculture and industry, producer and consumer, that non-violent technologies can establish themselves in a violent world.

Shambu Prasad is a doctoral student researching the social history of Khadi at the Indian Institute of Technology, New Delhi. **Uzramma** is the founder of Dastkar Andhra, an organisation that does research and consultancy for artisan industries.

Illustration: **Amit Mathur**

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Poems from Sanjeev Sethi

RUMMY

Neighbour, wife and me
are playing rummy.
Cards in hand,
cigarette between lips.
The fan lets a cinder
fall on the wife.
She screams:
"Can't you be careful?
Your smoking has burnt my
skin."
Banteringly, the neighbour retorts:
"In this land, where wives are
burnt
like coal, where's a cinder ?
Come let's shuffle the cards
and begin again."

NON-VIOLENT NUGGETS

LITTLE CONTRIBUTIONS TO FREEDOM

ASHA SINGH

I grew up in an environment of post-independence political frenzy, collecting Congress badges as toys, running up and down the dais during Congress sessions. The fervour and wildfire-spread of the freedom struggle was constructed as oral history by friends and folks in the immediate family. All this was part of the daily living stories of several common people who had close encounters in the assertion for a self-sustained nation.

Childhood recall is dotted with memories of uncles, cousins and aunts describing personal adventures of going to jail, giving speeches to give up western clothes, participating in *prabhat pheries*, or an uncle losing eyesight because of inadequate nutrition in captivity. To me, as a child, it was fascinating that real people sounded like heroes of tales of valour—hiding name-lists of protesters in socks and taking it to leaders in hiding, or an uncle who hid an important document behind an electricity meter, or women who gave up wearing jewellery as it was no time for celebration.

All this listening to the emotional rendering of personal involvement was great fodder for motivation. I remember envying their good fortune to be able to create history. It was with great pride that I asked my favourite aunt or cousin,' 'Will at least one history book talk about you? Do all the people know you?' But these family narrators were amazingly self-effacing.

Even as a child, it became clear to me that the Indian struggle for independence was a mass movement because people joined it willingly without any fear of violence. I gathered my own first hand experience that the struggle for this free nation was a people's co-operative movement guided by ahimsa. Ahimsa not only brought in more participants, it generated novel and simple ideas in people to resist foreign domination. People fasted, they went about creating and singing songs of freedom, burning foreign clothes or giving away large donations. I guess it was the non-violent mode of struggle that left behind so many survivors who would tell us their tales even in the sixties.

Now I attempt to regenerate that spirit for my children. I reconstruct for them those daily stories of my childhood, bringing alive the binding force of non-violence. I speak to them about those fiery youth of pre-independent India—how college students went marching out wearing khadi. 'The *charkha* was part of our homes and every member of the family would spin yarn', an aunt studying in a Lucknow college in the late thirties would say. She would continue, 'we would think of a new plan with each new occasion or festival. We would go in great big masses to tie *rakhis* to the police who served the British. Perhaps this endearing act would make them less harsh with their *lathis*', she laughed.

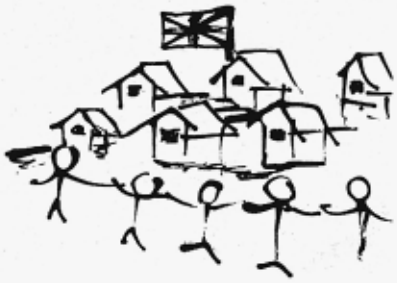
A student activist once recounted how, since his family had abandoned western textiles and burnt them, an uncle was denied an Indian Civil Service post. And how people gave up their jobs and joined the movement. A female cousin, who later became a teacher, said to me, 'I sometimes had to hide my *khaddar* saree. Often I made excuses to escort my little cousin to school and joined the *prabhat pheri*. After all we were not harming anyone but only asking for our rights'. I realised that such a defiance of oppressive social authority for a just cause can be deeply gratifying and joyful, especially when the means are non-violent.

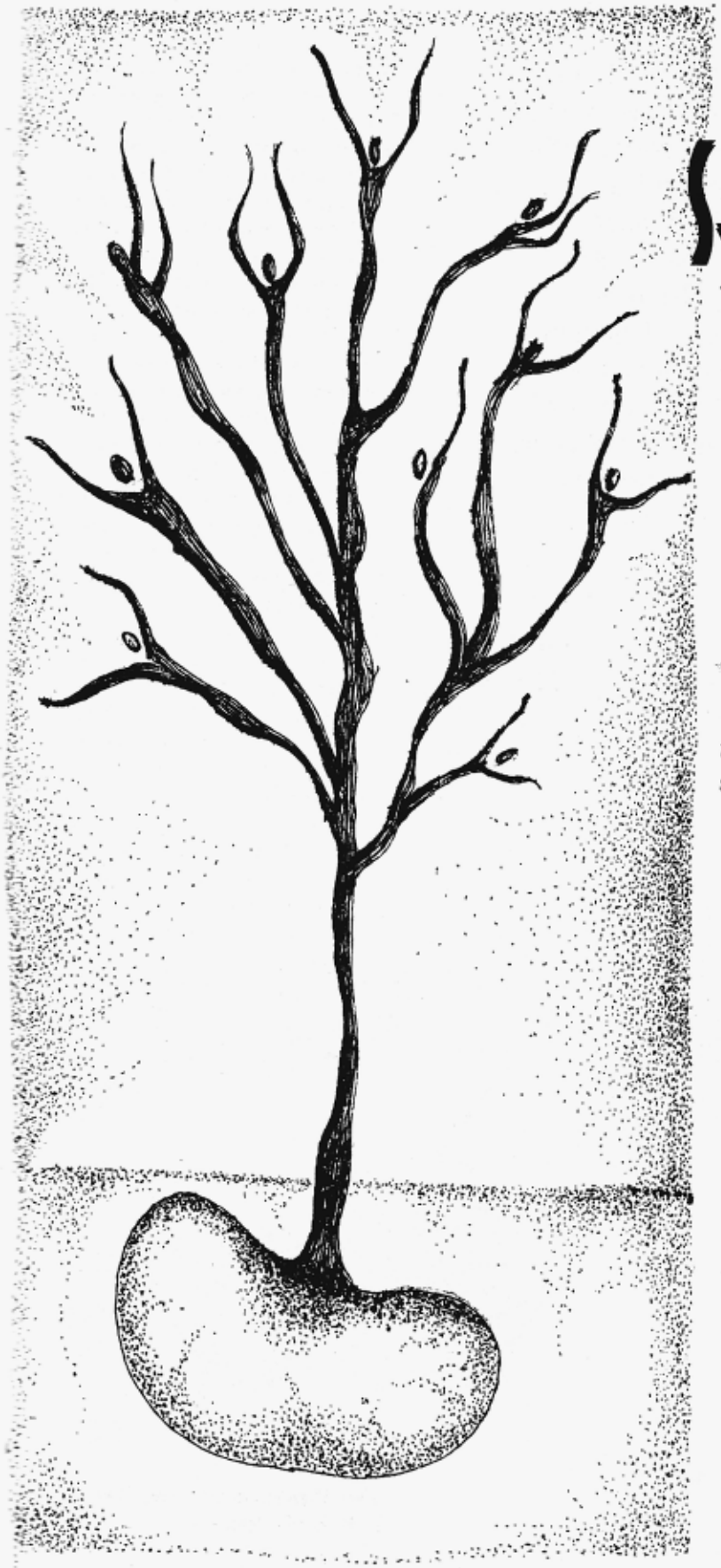
I have come across people who were dejected and frustrated because they were unable to defy their parents and join Gandhiji. But some families openly asserted their allegiance to him and followed the rhythm and routine that he established. If he fasted, even the child in the family fasted. The movement reached such a dizzy pace that Rajaji had to caution the students to study and let the leaders and elders continue the strife. My most prized anecdote is my family tailor's account of his experience,' We were told by Gandhiji to always carry our scissors to cut off wires of British loudspeakers and also to cut off the ropes used by them to cordon off processions'.

We are descendents of those same people. Most of my narrators are unsung and unidentified, yet they feel no sense of being wronged. Perhaps, the involvement of the common man can best be summarised by 'the man in a small village in Andhra Pradesh who did not shave for thirty years and on 15 August 1947, shaved off his beard in a public gathering' (*The Hindu*, 15 August 1997).

Asha Singh teaches Child Development at the Lady Irwin College, New Delhi. She has spent ten years studying children and working with them at Bal Bhawan, mobile creches or in communities of weavers and farmers. She is presently doing research in understanding the cultural roots of teacher–student interactions. Besides children and childhood, Asha has a deep interest in music, dance and theatre which she has used in her work with children. Her father was Secretary of the Congress party from 1956 – 1962 and a close associate of Nehru and Shastri. Her mother also worked for the party.

Illustration: **Manav Jalan**





SEED SATYAGRAHA

The Non-violent Protection of Indigenous Freedom

VANDANA SHIVA

Sustaining diversity of natural and cultural species should be the mandate of a non-violent concept of freedom, argues the author. This should be consciously cultivated by regenerating the seed as the post-independence symbol of freedom.

The roots of Violence and Non-violence

Violence and nonviolence are primarily relational categories. As Gandhi said, non-violence is just not the absence of violence, it is an active engagement in compassion. Translated into economics, violence is the characteristic of economic structures and economic organisations in which the ecological space for other species and other people is usurped or enclosed.

The *Isho Upanishad* says:

> *'The universe is the creation of the Supreme power meant for the benefit of [all] creation. Each individual life form must, therefore, learn to enjoy its benefits by forming a part of the system in close relation with other species. Let not any one species encroach upon the rights of others.'*

Whenever we engage in consumption or production patterns which take more than we need, we are engaging in violence. Thus non-sustainable consumption and non-sustainable production constitute a violent economic order. The criterion of not taking more than you need is not merely an ethical criterion - it is also the

highest expression of the precautionary principle since it ensures avoiding harm in the absence of the full knowledge of the impact of our actions.

Diversity and pluralism are necessary characteristics of an *ahimsic* or non-violent economic order. They therefore, become the litmus tests for non-violence and reflect the sustainability and justice that non-violence embodies.

Non-violence and Diversity

Intolerance of diversity is the biggest threat to peace in our times. The *cultivation* of diversity, is in my view, the most significant contribution to peace - peace with nature and peace between diverse people. I say cultivation because it has to be a conscious and creative act, intellectually and in practice. It demands more than mere tolerance of diversity, because tolerance is not enough to contain the war unleashed by the intolerance of diversity.

Diversity is intimately linked to self-organisation. Decentralisation and local democratic control are political corollaries of the cultivation of diversity. Peace is also derived from conditions in which diverse species and communities have the freedom to self-organise and evolve according to their own needs, structures and priorities.

Living societies, living ecosystems and living organisms are characterisd by three principles:

(a) the principle of diversity
(b) the principle of self-organisation, self-regulation and self- renewal
(c) the system of reciprocity between systems, which is also called the law of return.

The distinctiveness and identity of diverse cultures and species is the most precious source of cultural and ecological richness. One of the distinguishing properties of living systems is their ability to undergo continual structural changes while preserving their form and pattern of organisation. This is as true of living cultures as it is of living organisms. The components of a living system are continually renewed and recycled with structural interaction with the environment. Yet the individual system maintains its pattern, its organisation, its distinctions from other cultures or organisms even while interacting with them. This capacity to self-organise is what makes for cultural and biological diversity and pluralism. Since self-organising systems are autonomous and self-referential, though not insulated from others, they are at peace with themselves and they interact under conditions of freedom and peace. A self-organising system knows what it has to import or export in order to maintain and renew itself. It needs nothing but the reference itself. Self-organised systems interact with their environment but in autonomy. The environment only triggers the structural changes; it does not specify or direct them. It is the living system which specifies its own structural changes.

The 'global' does not represent the universal human interest; rather it represents a particular local and parochial interest which has been globalised through its reach and control.

The cultivation of diversity is, therefore, a non-violent response to the violence of globalisation, homogenisation and monocultures.

It is the same freedom for diverse species and ecosystems to self-organise that is the basis of ecology. Ecological stability derives from the ability of species and ecosystems to adapt evolve and respond. Ecological vulnerability comes from the fact that species and ecosystems have been engineered and controlled to such an extent that they loose the capability to adapt.

Chilean scientists, Maturana and Varela have distinguished between two kinds of systems -autopoietic and allopoietic. A system is autopoietic when its function is primarily geared to self-renewal. An autopoietic system refers in the first place to itself and is therefore, self-referential. In contrast, an allopoietic system, such as the intervention of a machine, refers to a function given from outside, such as the production of a specific output.

The Violence of Free Trade and Globalisation

Globalisation is an example of the transformation of what were once autopoietic systems into allopoietic ones. Globalisation is not the cross-cultural

interaction of diverse societies. Nor is it the search for ecological balance on a planetary scale. It is the dominance of one class, one race and often one gender over all others. The 'global' in the dominant discourse is the political space in which the dominant local seeks global control, and frees itself of local, natural and global responsibility arising from the imperatives of ecological sustainability and social justice. The 'global' in this sense does not represent the universal human interest; rather it represents a particular local and parochial interest which has been globalised through its reach and control. Globalisation in a world characterised by diversity can only be realised by ripping apart its plural fabric and its self-regulating and self-renewing capacity. In doing so, it has established a violent order, both in terms of coercive structures and in terms of ecological and social disintegration. The cultivation of diversity is, therefore, a non-violent response to the violence of globalisation, homogenisation and monocultures.

Globalisation has come in three waves. The first wave was the colonisation of America, Africa, Asia and Australia by European Powers over five hundred years. The second was the imposition of the western idea of development in the post-colonial era of the past five decades and the third was unleashed about five years ago in the form of 'free trade', which for some commentators, signifies the end of history. For us in the Third World, this is the history of recolonisation. Each wave of globalisation is cumulative in its impact, even while it creates a discontinuity in the dominant metaphors and actors.

The Violence of Monocultures

Making peace with diversity is fast becoming a survival imperative in our times of 'ethnic cleansing' and the spread of monocultures in nature and society. Monocultures are an essential component of globalisation. This war against diversity is not entirely new. Violence and war are rooted in the premise of diversity as a threat, disease, perversion, and a source of disorder. Globalisation transforms diversity into a disease and deficiency because diverse systems cannot be brought under centralised control. Global control of raw materials and markets makes monocultures necessary, introducing violence at many levels.

Monocultures are vulnerable to ecological breakdown and are non-sustainable. Uniformity implies that disturbance to one part of the system is translated to disturbance of other parts. Sustainability and diversity are ecologically linked because diversity offers the self-regulation and multiplicity of interactions which can heal ecological disturbance. The vulnerability of monocultures and the resilience of diversity are well illustrated in agriculture. The total failure of the cotton crop in Andhra Pradesh is an example of the vulnerability of monocultures to pests and disease.

What happens in nature also happens in society. Contexts in which homogenisation is imposed on diverse systems through global integration, creates conditions in which region after region starts disintegrating. There is violence inherent in global integration which is determined by a particular culture or particular centre of economic and political power. This violence, in turn, breeds violence amongst its victims. As conditions of everyday life are increasingly controlled by forces beyond people's control and people's perceptions, as identity is eroded due to the decay of local governance, people cling to their diverse identities as a source of security in a period of insecurity. Tragically, when the source of their insecurity is so remote that it cannot be identified, diverse people, who have lived peacefully together, start looking at each other with fear. Diversity turns into fragmentation and is transformed into a justification for violence and war as we have seen in Lebanon, India, Sri Lanka, Yugoslavia, Sudan, Los Angeles, Germany, Italy, France. As local and national systems of governance break down because of pressures of globalisation, local power elites attempt to cling to power by manipulating the ethnic or religious feelings that emerge as a backlash to globalisation.

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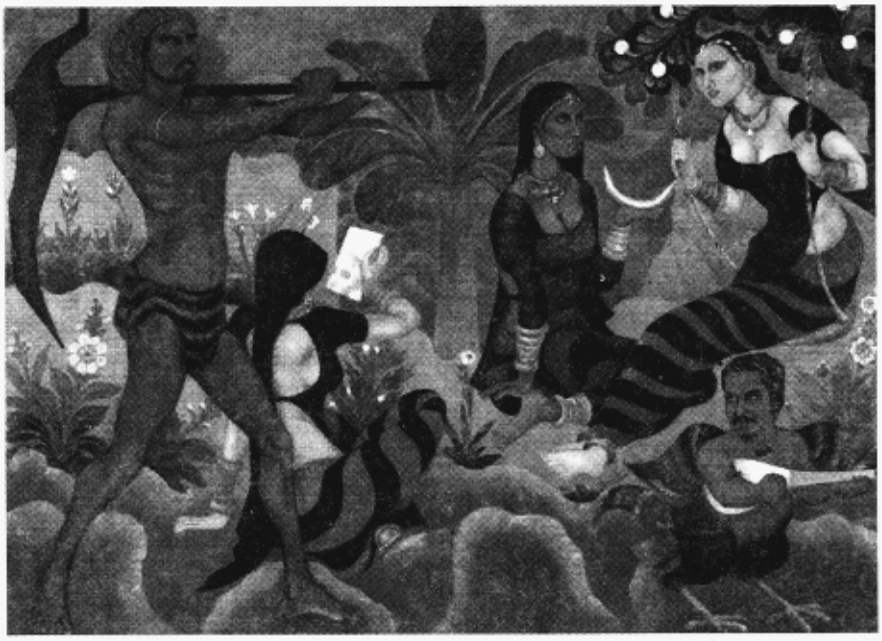
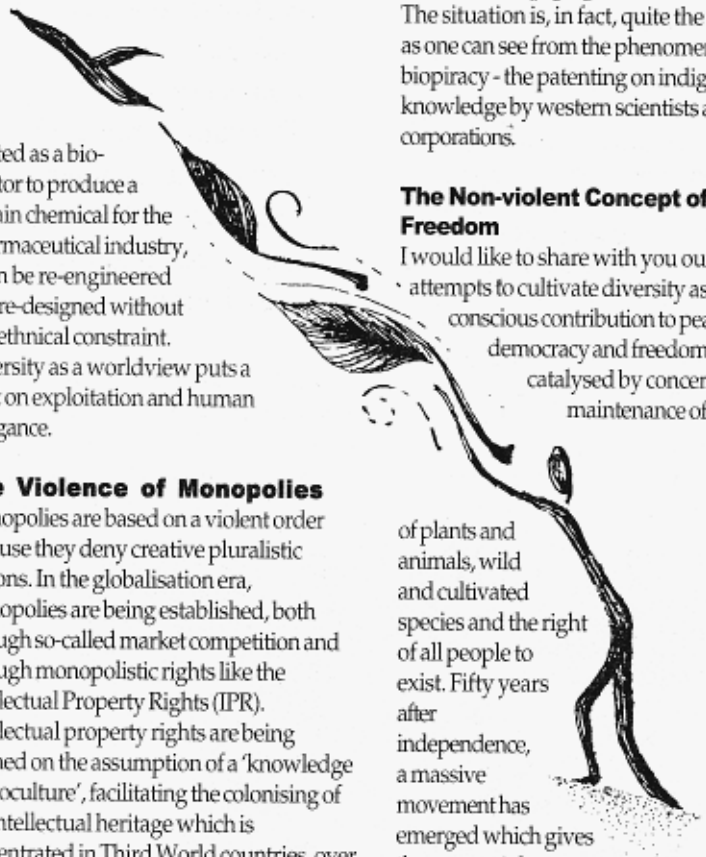


Painting by Ramachandran

Centralisation and uniformity are often touted as growth imperatives. However, what is never asked is, growth of what? When multi-dimensional diverse systems are perceived in their multi-dimensionality and diversity, they are found to have high productivity. A blinkered approach deems it low productivity—an approach, which evaluates and assesses only in a uni-dimensional framework. This uni-dimensionality is related to an instrumental worldview. When a pig or cow is merely



treated as a bio-reactor to produce a certain chemical for the pharmaceutical industry, it can be re-engineered and re-designed without any ethnical constraint. Diversity as a worldview puts a limit on exploitation and human arrogance.

The Violence of Monopolies

Monopolies are based on a violent order because they deny creative pluralistic options. In the globalisation era, monopolies are being established, both through so-called market competition and through monopolistic rights like the Intellectual Property Rights (IPR). Intellectual property rights are being defined on the assumption of a 'knowledge monoculture', facilitating the colonising of the intellectual heritage which is concentrated in Third World countries, over five centuries of unilaterally determined exchange. The Intellectual Property Rights Treaty in GATT recognises IPRs only as private rights, not as common rights. This excludes the knowledge, ideas and innovations of the intellectual commons in villages among farmers, in forests among tribals, and even in universities among scientists.

IPRs are recognised only when knowledge and innovation generates profits, not when it meets social needs. More significantly, by reducing human knowledge to the status of private property, intellectual property rights are shrinking the human potential to innovate and create because they transform the sharing and exchange of ideas into theft and piracy.

The US has often declared that IPR laws are needed to prevent countries like India from engaging in intellectual piracy. The situation is, in fact, quite the reverse, as one can see from the phenomenon of biopiracy - the patenting on indigenous knowledge by western scientists and corporations.

The Non-violent Concept of Freedom

I would like to share with you our small attempts to cultivate diversity as a conscious contribution to peace, democracy and freedom, catalysed by concern for the maintenance of biological diversity of plants and animals, wild and cultivated species and the right of all people to exist. Fifty years after independence, a massive movement has emerged which gives these non-violent concepts of freedom a new relevance and a new life.

We call this movement started by Navdanya the 'Seed Satyagraha' following the Gandhian tradition of peaceful non-cooperation with unjust laws and regimes. As he stated in *Hind Swaraj*,' As long as the superstition that the people should obey unjust laws exists, so long will slavery exist. And a passive resister alone can remove such a superstition.' *Satyagraha* is also the key to self-rule or *swaraj*..

At a massive farmers rally in Delhi in March '93, we evolved a charter of farmers' rights. One of the rights is local sovereignty. 'Local resources have to be managed on the principle of sovereignty, wherein the natural resources of the village belong to the village'. This struggle to protect farmer's rights has been consistently built, locally, nationally and globally.

Throughout India, people have declared that they will violate the TRIP's treaty of WTO, if is implemented, since it violates their birthright.

A central part of the Seed Satyagraha is to declare the 'common intellectual rights' of Third World communities who gifted the world with knowledge systems born from nature's diversity. The innovations of Third World communities might differ in processes and objectives from the innovations that contribute to the commerce of the West. But they cannot be discounted just because they are different. We are going beyond saying no, we are creating alternatives by conserving biodiversity, building community seed banks, strengthening farmers' seed supplies and searching for sustainable agriculture options suitable for different regions.

The seed has become for us the site and symbol of freedom in an age of manipulation and monopoly. It plays the role of Gandhi's spinning wheel. The *charkha* had become an important symbol of freedom, not because it was it big and powerful, but because it was small and could come alive as a sign of resistance in the smallest of huts and poorest of families. In smallness lay its power.

Vandana Shiva is the author of the much acclaimed *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development*. Physicist, philosopher, feminist and author of many books, she is Director of the Research Foundation for Science and Technology and Natural Resource Policy, Dehradun. Her's is the one of the most strident international voices in defence of Third World environmental rights. Her consistent work in this area has earned her the Right Livelihood Award and several others. Vandana is our scholar/consultant for the Environment/Technology/Livelihood themes in INDIA'S QUEST.

Illustrations: **Indrani Sen**

Themes for the forthcoming issues of THE EYE

We invite our readers and others to send us articles for the following:

- **Governance**
- **Pluralism**
- **Education**
- **Sacred India**

For explanations, please refer to page 3.
We are looking for originality of thought expressed in excellent language.
Remember that THE EYE is a magazine of inspiration not information.
The editor's decision will be final.

Narasimha

PRABHAKAR BEGDE

Illustration: **Indrani Sen**

Vishnu, the preserver and the upholder of the universe, descends to the earth from time to time to restore balance and uphold dharma, the law of righteousness. Narasimha is his fourth incarnation in the sequence of ten. This is the fearsome aspect (*raudra rupa*) of the ordinarily serene God. Narasimha or Narsimhavatara—man (*nara*) lion (*simha*)—incarnation (*avatar*) of Vishnu is depicted with a lion's face and a human body.

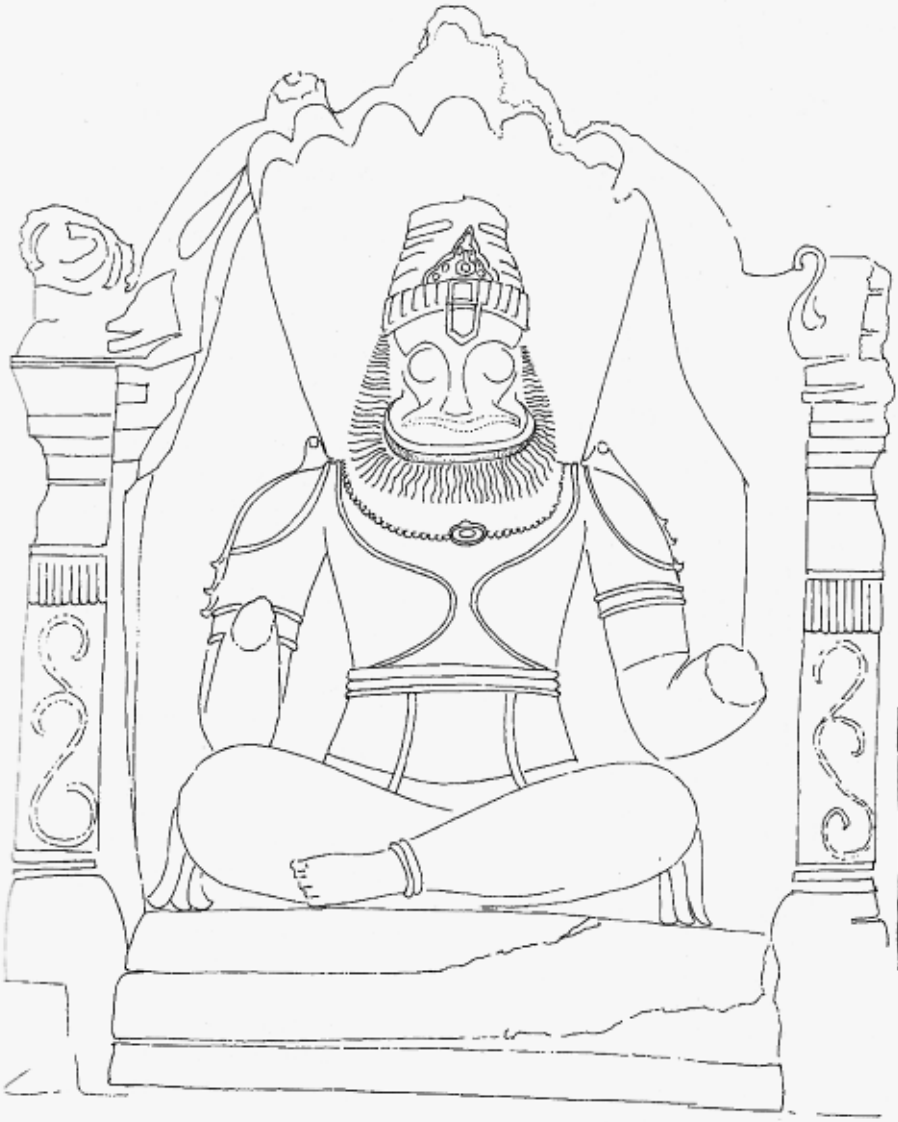
The story behind this *avatar* is as follows. Hiranyakashyapu was a demon-king whose confidence in his own immortality stemmed from the fact that he had received a boon from the gods that would ensure that he would not be killed either by man or animal, by night or day, neither on earth nor in water. This boon encouraged him to defy all codes of morality and terrorise the world. His oppression extended even to his own son, Prahlada.

In order to punish Hiranyakashyapu, Vishnu decided to take on the form (*Narasimha*) which was neither man nor animal, and burst forth from a pillar in the palace in the hour of twilight which was neither day nor night. When the demon-king saw the Lord in this awesome form, he was bereft of all energy and valour, and left him infirm and weak. Narasimha picked him up and put him on his knees, which was neither earth nor air, and tore him apart with bare claws. Evil is thus destroyed and dharma triumphs.

This huge free-standing monolith sculpture of Narasimha at Vijayanagara, ordered by King Krishnadeva Raya in 1528 AD, is about 6.7 metres high. Its demoniac expression and animated carving is awesome. He is an embodiment of fury, eyes blazing in anger and his mane fanning out. The huge hood of the great cobra, Shesha or Ananta towers over the head of Narasimha.

The man-lion cult is of ancient origin and arose when courage and valour were worshipped as aspects of divinity. Narasimha is also said to embody the verses of the Yajurveda because strength and courage are said to flow from them. Kings and warriors worshipped Narasimha who was invoked especially to protect them from the incantations of enemies.

Prabhakar Begde is an architect, writer and critic. He is the author of *Ancient and Medieval Town Planning in India* (1978), *Forts and Palaces of India* (1982), and *Living Sculpture* (1996). A prolific writer on Indian art, architecture and culture, he is a Visiting Faculty at the TVB School of Habitat Studies, New Delhi.

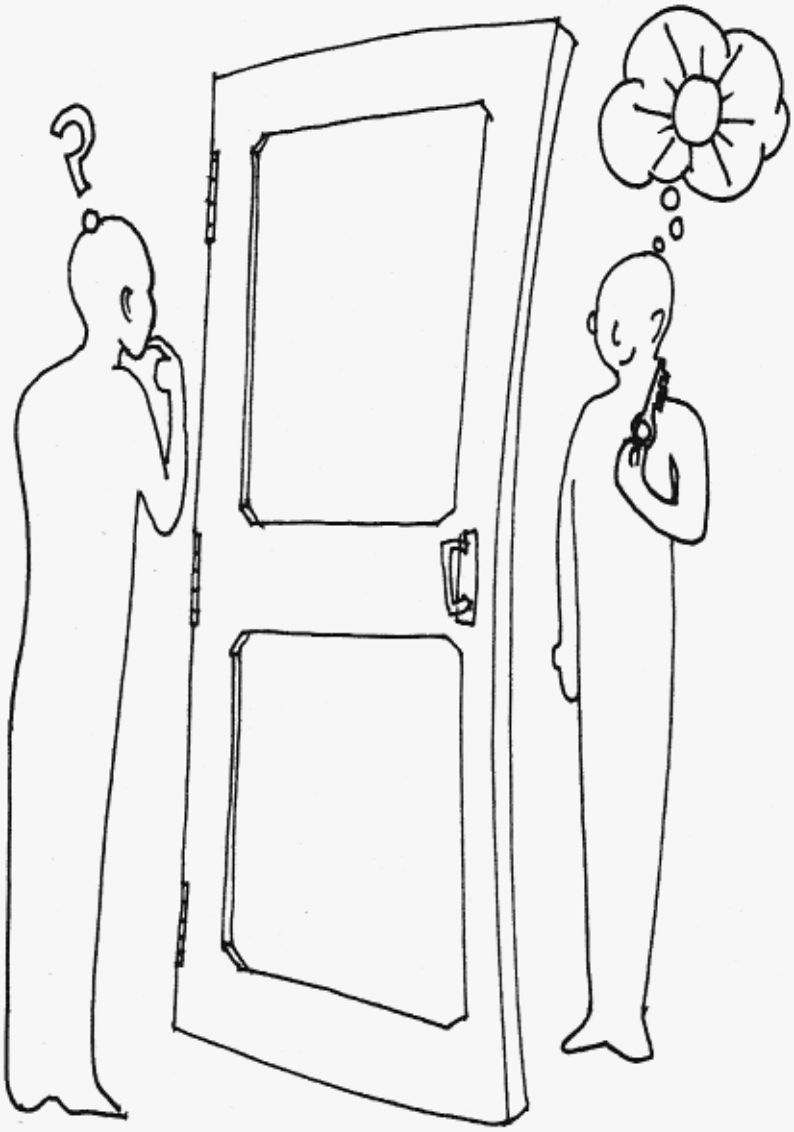


Narasimha
Vijayanagara, early 16th century
Vijayanagara, Karnataka

OF DOORS, FAST FOOD CAFES, FACADES AND WATCHTOWERS

H. MASUD TAJ

The Mechanism of Entrance



Amit Mathur

There are two kinds of doors:
those that swing-in like an invitation;
those that swing-out like a slap on your face.

There are two kinds of people who wish to enter:
the insiders and
the outsiders.

Insiders return; outsiders arrive for the first time. Insiders have the key; outsiders do not.

Insiders enter both doors in the same manner: they slip the key in, turn it clockwise and the lock unlocks. The door opens without having to think about it. The door continues to be a door.

Outsiders enter both doors in ways as different as their respective orientations.

Outsiders enter the in-swinging doors by knocking. Someone on the other side opens the door for them. The door continues to be a door.

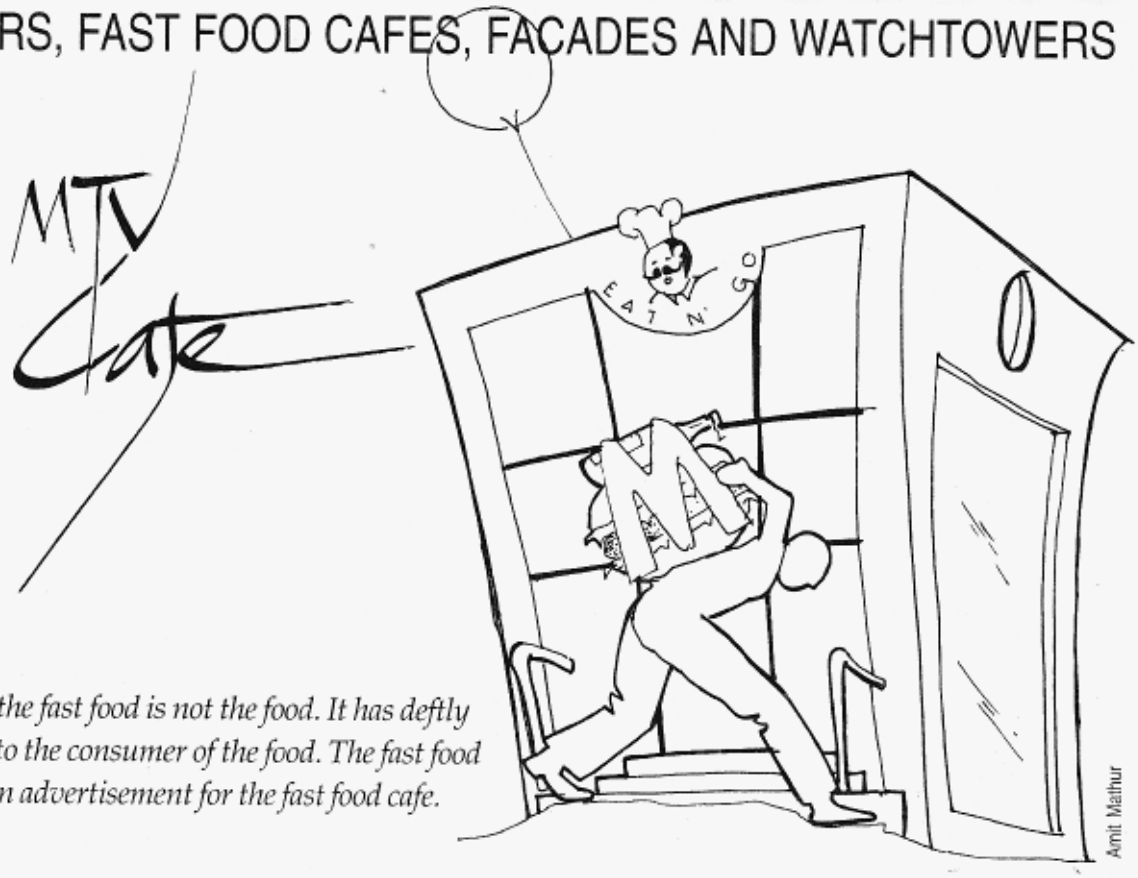
Outsiders do not enter the out-swinging door by knocking. Doors that swing-out refuse to open when you knock. They are designed to keep you out.
That very design entails that the hinges they hang upon are exposed to the outsider. The hinge is a vulnerable interlock held by a pin.

You push the pin out by tapping it from below, until the hinges come unhinged. You then pull the door and wrench it open from the side it was never meant to as it hangs from the lock that is now a hinge.

When you step in: you are no longer an outsider, the insiders no longer remain insiders, the lock can no longer lock that which is no longer a door.

VI LENS AND CLOSE-UPS

OF DOORS, FAST FOOD CAFES, FACADES AND WATCHTOWERS



Amit Mathur

The focus of the fast food is not the food. It has deftly been shifted to the consumer of the food. The fast food cafe is only an advertisement for the fast food cafe.

Snakes have very sophisticated organs of taste. They lick the air to get their bearing in the environment. The tongue flicks rapidly in and out, is forked to enable stereo-tasting (much as our eyes, ears and nostrils are paired; though our tongue is not).

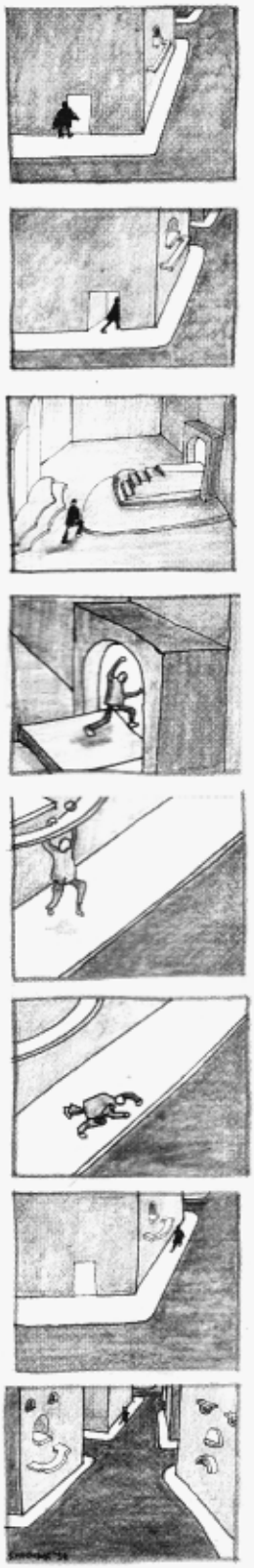
Restaurants are sites where the evolutionary-clock is wound back and the sense of taste is restored its original dominance. First the highly evolved human eyes have to be subdued by cutting off the light. Hence walls of specialised restaurants have no windows. There is only the door which is ornamented to intensify the ritual of crossing the threshold into a prenatal environment where the lights are dim and the music, soft. Gradually, the senses of seeing and hearing are phased out as the senses ot taste and smell are heightened. The focus is on the food and thus the tuning.

Fast food cafes turn the hushed environment inside out. The walls-without-window become windows-without-walls. The decorated door has disappeared. Amidst the floor-to-ceiling sheets of glass, the entrance door is almost an afterthought. One of the glasses pivots to let you in without a pause. And you step into a greater intensity of light and sound. Seeing is believing and sight's hegemony is reinforced by larger-than-life images of the eatables. Posters as Pavlovian-appetizers to see and salivate. It tastes good because it *looks* good. No matter if the menu is highly restricted and standardised to erase the last traces of human intervention (all Big Mac buns have an average of 178 sesame seeds and burgers are 3.875 inches across, weigh 1.6 ounces and contain 19 per cent fat).

The focus of the fast food is not the food. It has deftly been shifted to the consumer of food. More important than to eat there is to be seen there. The unwritten dress code is a diluted version of MTV. The resemblance is deeper. MTV on which you apparently see little advertisement, is an artfully conceived 24-hour advertising channel for the music industry. The all pervasive is always invisible. Guns Roses & Co. are gunning for our purchasing power. In a slick orchestration of images that change every 1.4 seconds (determined by the researched undivided-attention-span of today's distracted viewer) we are choreographed into buying our favourite number of the fortnight, or a ticket to the show if they visit our city or any product they may care to sponsor in the future.

The same number envelops us even as we eat. Even as we consume, we are being consumed. For the fast food cafe is only an advertisement for fast food cafe. The restaurant has become a giant showcase. Stepping inside, we are live mannequins on display. Stepping out, we are voyeurs that go window shopping into the night.

OF DOORS, FAST FOOD CAFES, FACADES AND WATCHTOWERS



Shounak Ray

Vanishing Faces

The invention of mobile spaces, the elevator and the automobile occurred simultaneously. One extended your mobility vertically and the other horizontally. One resulted in a coming together of people as never before in skyscrapers (elevator-shafts as vertical streets); and the other dispersed people as never before in suburbia (highways as horizontal shafts). In the schizoid city, you worked in high-density and lived in low-density far away.

We relate to facades because we relate to faces. 'Facade' shares with 'face' a common origin in Latin. *The Penguin Dictionary of Architecture* defines it as 'the front or face of a building, emphasised architecturally'.

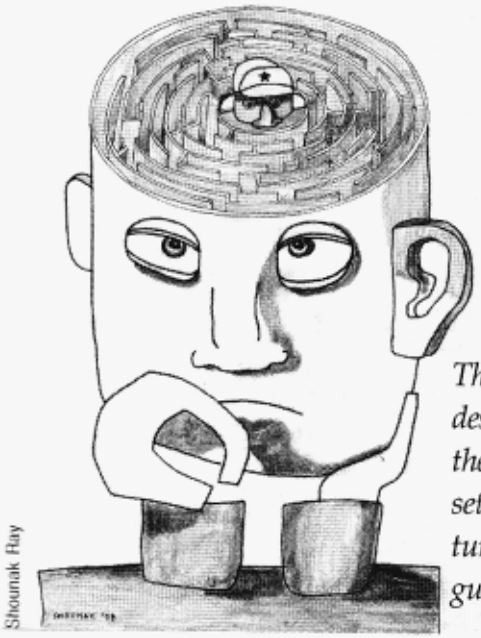
Face is the outcome of the skull beneath the skin along with the fleeting thoughts that facial muscles register (16 pairs of muscles converge down onto the mouth to make it smile or pout). The facade, though related to the skeleton that it sheathes, is not as mobile as the face is. Its expression lies in the manner in which it is articulated. It is animated by the moving sun in the sky and changing seasons. Shadows, as much as substance, make the facade.

Photographs of a face attract us but not x-rays of the same face (even if high cheekbones make the face sensuous, no one has fallen in love with the skull). It is only with aging or starvation that the skull begins to surface and the skin gives way. And yet, somewhere along the way, the architecture of facades voluntarily shifted from skin to skeleton. As it succumbed to structural determinism, the muscles atrophied and walls melted away. The modern facade became barely skin-deep.

Even the skin finally vanished and all that remained was the exoskeleton. But it was sheathed in glass; the euphemism for the absence of wall was 'curtain-wall'. All dazzle and no depth. The transparency was an illusion; buildings opposite each other stood face to face and relapsed into reductive mirroring. A veil of reflection that was a cover-up. The glass was the same as sun-glasses that politicians wore indoors. You were never to know what lay behind the face/facade; the scene was rendered obscene. Veiled inhabitants who saw everything. The gaze, as with all voyeurs, was one-way (what dialogue is to democracy, monologue is to fascism).

Without a facade the building was without a face. The international-style was expressionless. Next, the postmodern shroud that bore no relation to either the skeleton or the skin. Double walls to deny the absence of the wall, but with an abiding faith in Goebbels dictum: a lie repeated often enough will become the truth. Split-personalities parting company; one for the inside and one for the outside and may the twain never meet. Inventing multiple-personae, the facade had become a mask, interchangeable and arbitrary. We strove to overcome absence with many presences, viewers with voyeurs, wall with simulations, facade with masks and death with schizophrenia.

OF DOORS, FAST FOOD CAFES, FACADES AND WATCHTOWERS



Shounak Ray

City Never Sleeps

The occasional appearance of a destitute street nomad...in front of the Museum of Contemporary Art sets off quite a panic; video cameras turn on their mounts and security guards adjust their belts.

Mike Davis: *City of Quartz.*

In *Jingle All the Way* there's a confrontation in a shopping mall. It is Arnold Schwarzenegger versus the surveillance camera; no matter how fast and how far he backs away, the electronic gaze continues to zoom into him. There is no place that is out of sight.

The scene encapsulates what the spectacle of the shopping mall seeks to suppress: the technology of surveillance that makes it possible. Metropolis, the mother of all spectacles, is straddled with the suffix 'polis'. It is the same root that nourishes 'policy' and 'police'; you adhere and you obey.

Late capitalism strives to take over public domains and convert them to profit-making ventures. In the process, they render explicit the previously implicit; the monitoring is now overt. Hence vigilant videocams that neither blink nor sleep (the word 'surveillance' is derived from the Latin *vigilia*: 'wakefulness, sleeplessness'. Public squares reincarnate into shopping malls which are great places to gather but not great places to express dissent. And unlike public squares, you are on private property and are encouraged to reciprocate your admittance by shopping. To be is to buy.

The architecture of surveillance was realised even before Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. It was the eighteenth-century Panopticon, the prototype of a prison designed by Jeremy Bentham (inspired by the Military Academy of Paris, 1751). Two centuries later, Foucault termed it as 'an event in the history of the human mind' as he proceeded to dissect the surveillance driven society.

It was a circular courtyard whose centre was an observation tower, axis mundi of power, and whose circumference was a building in the shape of a ring. The ring was made up of prisoner cells. One looked into the courtyard and the other on the opposite wall looking outside. Sandwiched between two windows, prisoners were reduced to clearly defined silhouettes observed by a guard in the central tower. Bentham was aware of the importance of his diagram: transparency as a means of control. He proclaimed it to be a 'revolutionary discovery' in the aid of prisons, hospitals and schools!

The gaze is now focused on the gazer. In a conceptual artwork for the Net, the artist Rory Hamilton, proposed, 'A video camera pointed at Jeremy Bentham's body, updating five images onto the Internet every five minutes. The creator of the Panopticon is himself on view to millions of Internet users around the world. The tables have been turned.'

Have they? The panopticon mechanism persists in various guises. Corporations are seriously considering installing parsec as a monitoring system. It assigns a unique number to every object and employee, links them both, constantly transmitting the information through radio waves to a central computer. The door will not open if you try to leave the workplace with a floppy-disc, or anything else that you are not supposed to have. Big Brother sees everything, now with eyes closed.

When it opens them, it sees too much. Schwarzenegger again, this time in *Eraser* with super-guns. Telescopic-sight transfixes you; x-ray peeping toms that zoom into your pulsating, vulnerable heart. In 1925, Lazlo Moholy-Nagy said, 'Television ... has been invented ... tomorrow we shall be able to look into the heart of our fellow man'. Seventy-one years later we track those hearts as moving targets.

Architect, calligrapher, poet, **H. Masud Taj** as a student spent half a year backpacking in Europe and Egypt, resulting in a story that was broadcast on BBC. He is involved with all aspects of architecture: building, teaching, writing. He has a modest, independent practice as he believes the act of building provides insights which enrich and ground his other expressions. Furthermore, as architecture nurtures a mind adept at synthesis, he taps those skills as an interdisciplinary consultant. He divides his time between Mumbai and New Delhi.

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NO SAFE SPACES

MALAVIKA KARLEKAR

. . . Violence and the Girl Child

Though the state decided to pay attention to the girl child by concentrating on obvious parameters of inequality, it is only looking at the tip of the iceberg. Though that cannot go unheeded, we need to turn our gaze from the violence unleashed in public spaces to the realm of the violence of private spaces which escapes under the convenient rubric of privacy and the right to individual freedom.

In recent years, thanks largely to a dynamic women's movement, we have an impressive body of data on acts of violence and criminality against women and girl children. Yet, the very nature of recording procedures and an overall view that violence is largely physical, means that there is little or no information on non-physical acts of oppression such as mental torture, verbal abuse, denial of food and clothing, and in the case of girl children, hours of unpaid labour often under inhuman conditions. I argue here, that though the state, a few years ago, decided to pay attention to the girl child by concentrating on obvious parameters of inequality such as lack of access to schooling, public health care and so on, it is still dealing with only the proverbial tip of the iceberg. In other words, public spaces are under scrutiny—the private realm of the family escapes under the convenient rubric of privacy and the right to individual freedom. That such data is necessarily flawed is the growing refrain of activists, academics and others, who are concerned that complacence may overtake data-gatherers and information brokers.

According to recent demographic figures, almost 2 million Indian girls are nineteen years or less. Of these, nearly 30 per cent are married before the legal

age of eighteen. Why do families continue to choose early marriage for their daughters? And what kind of life do these young women lead in their parents' homes, and later, in those of their husbands? A major output of the women's movements has been a rich storehouse of information and data on women at every stage—exposures of foeticide and infanticide of girl children being a case in point. While both these methods of dealing with unwanted babies go back in historical time, of more recent origin is the misuse of medical tests even in parts of the country where it was previously unknown. What are some of the ethical questions regarding this? If abortions are legal, why are different standards applied to sex-determination tests which may or may not be used to influence sex-selective abortions? How can one combat the logic of those who argue that it is better to avoid the suffering imposed on unwanted girl babies by not allowing them to be born? In a democratic society, why should the state interfere in the right of couples to decide whether they want girls or not? This is particularly so in India where the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) as a form of birth control is actively encouraged by the medical establishment. In other words, feminists and concerned citizens need to acknowledge that in asking for women to have the right of control over their bodies, they have also to accept the caveat that women themselves may work against future generations of their gender. However, those who want to make a distinction between a gender-neutral abortion and those induced following sex selective tests, argue that the latter actively work against equality and the right to life for girls.

Jyoti Bhatt

While such arguments are likely to continue for some time to come, there is a growing acceptance of the fact that the home is an arena for struggle and competition. In this context, Amartya Sen's concepts of expectations and entitlements become significant. An entitlement represents the right to a share of resources such as health care, nutrition, education and material assets as well as to parental attention and interest. The distribution of these resources is usually in keeping with a family ideology which finds expression in the household. Numerous studies indicate that girls are usually far less privileged than boys with regard to access to food, education and parental care. And this is not only a function of poverty: discrimination in food exists in middle class homes across geographic regions and ethnic and religious boundaries, indicating that factors other than scarcity are at play. Thus invariably, views on a girl's *expectations* take greater precedence over her right to greater individual *entitlement*.

Let us take the example of food as one of the vital issues under debate. Inequality in this respect is rationalised through beliefs which associate the generation of body heat with meat, fish and eggs. Girls are to be fed more cereals and vegetables and some milk products, for heat and hence passion are strictly eschewed. The fact that boys have greater access to the outside world means also that they can squirrel away a little from the household's food budget for snacks and fruit. A young woman makes do with rice gruel while her brother buys toffees on his way to school. In cases of ill health, it is usually boys who are treated; they also seem to be more articulate about their ailments. Some years ago, a counsellor attached to a major hospital in Delhi reported the high incidence of 'difficult' boys brought to her. On further questioning, she admitted that girls were equally disturbed. But families either tended to brush such matters under the ubiquitous carpet or the girls themselves internalised their distress. They became withdrawn, silent and prone to psychosomatic disorders. On the other hand, boys were aggressive and unpleasant, demanding attention and care. Studies have established that there are wider sex-differences in providing medical care than in food allocation.

The onus of looking after their siblings in urban slums and rural areas, while their mothers are out working, falls on the tender shoulders of young girls. Recent estimates show that 45 million children need child care services; yet government-sponsored schemes and those in the organised sector cover a mere 3,000,000 children. But girls are not only child-minders; almost half of the Indian woman's share in agricultural operations is covered by female child labour. Young women work in the coir industry in Kerala and the match factories of Sivakasi. Apart from wage exploitation, they are subjected to sexual harassment and abuse. A girl in rural India works an average of nine hours a day and 315 days in the year, often without adequate nourishment and care. But will her family admit that she is abused and exploited? Or is she seen as merely doing her duty by them?

Nonetheless, even if we allow for culture and class bound variations in defining categories, in situations where the 'choice' is not always between death and survival, there is a distinction to be drawn between involuntary compulsions and deliberate abuse and violation. Nor is abuse which violates a girl's sense of physical and psychological integrity limited only to the work place. The overarching Indian attitude of secrecy and suppression which governs any reference to sex makes it difficult to come to any definite conclusions on the extent of sexual abuse of children. Yet, in 1990, of the almost 10,000 reported cases of rape of women and girls, an alarming 25 per cent was of those below sixteen and about a fifth were less than ten years old. A recent analysis done by the Crimes Against Women Cell of the Delhi Police, points out that of the 143 rape cases registered between January and June 1992, 107 i.e., almost 75 per cent of victims were

Yogesh Chitlangia

The onus of looking after their siblings in urban slums and rural areas, while their mothers are out working, falls on the tender shoulders of young girls.

in the age range of 7 to 18 years. What was even more alarming was the revelation that in 114 cases the prosecutrix knew the accused; of these 40 were immediate neighbours and seven were relatives.

While till a few years ago, there was almost no reporting on father-daughter incest, officials at the Cell now concede that a growing number of mothers come to them with such stories. Such incidents are not only indicative of a girl child's vulnerability in and around her home, but also of a social climate which turns a blind eye to such transgressions. Not unexpectedly then, little thought is given to how a young girl views her sexual violation. In an environment where physical contact, both affectionate as well as abusive, by relatives and family friends of either sex is not unknown, child rape and molestation need to be viewed a little differently from similar behaviour with a post-pubertal girl. A little child may not be aware that the intentions of an uncle who fondles her can be very different from when he thrashes her. She may even unwittingly invite such attention, seeing it as a manifestation of caring.

Marriage for most women establishes a network of interacting individuals—it is rarely only a highly personal relationship between a man and a woman. Most important, of course, is her adjustment to the conjugal relationship. As control of her sexuality and its safe transference into the hands of the husband is of primary importance, concern over the conduct of the sexually vulnerable girl is an important cause of early marriage. The dishonour associated with a girl who is known to be no longer a virgin is a stigma most families will avoid. Though the age of marriage is rising gradually, it is important to note that a large number of girls are barely out of their teens as they leave their natal homes for another unknown residence. The exception is the welcome familiarity characterising cross-cousin marriages. The persistence of a dominant family ideology which believes in strict sexual division of labour and gender hierarchy means that young wives have to invest considerable time and energy in adjusting to new relationships. A culture of silence enmeshes a girl's sexual vulnerability—little thought is given to her sexual needs, proclivities or indeed inhibitions. Indian law does not recognise marital rape; yet, it is more than likely that many victims are unsuspecting little girls.

Feminine vulnerability is not specific or limited to any one culture; however what do mark the differences are societal and familial values. Where at least a third of the country's population lives below the poverty line, it is to be expected that a girl child chips in to keep the hearth going. But her situation becomes increasingly untenable in an environment of growing violence and insecurity. Girls fear walking to school in neighbouring villages through lonely stretches and deserted paths; fields in rural India and urban latrines in slums have now been established as unsafe spaces. It is well known that at every level of schooling, the number of girls enrolled is much lower than that of boys. And when going to school means proneness to danger and a complex interplay of factors, many of which are rarely articulated, it works to keep girls out of the system.

Familial views on what should be a girl's expectations take precedence over the right to a greater individual entitlement and on the whole, reinforce her growing sense of marginalisation, powerlessness and vulnerability. Yet with age, and increase in status through marriage and motherhood, the more advantaged older woman is able to carve out a niche for herself. The extent to which she can to do so however, is determined by whether she has been able to overcome a childhood of denial and oppression. This is neither easy nor common. In order to understand better the well-worn cliche, 'the status of women', it is vital to view the present in the context of individual pasts. The situation cannot improve until the Indian family is placed under the microscope which will magnify the many assumptions and values which are to be interrogated and debunked.

Dr. Malavika Karlekar is Editor, *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, Centre for Women's Development Studies, New Delhi. A social anthropologist who taught for a decade at the Delhi School of Economics and Jamia Millia Islamia before joining CWDS as a Senior Fellow, she is now a full time researcher. Her publications include two books—*Poverty and Women's Work: A Study of Sweeper Women in Delhi* and *Voices from Within: Early Narratives of Bengali Women*, as well as several reports, papers and reviews.

UNIVERSAL RESPONSIBILITY:

KEY TO A GENTLER WORLD

His Holiness the Dalai Lama

Courtesy: Rajiv Vohra, Gandhi Peace Foundation

I have lived the best and greater part of my life in India as a refugee, my physical body nourished by the food of this country and my mind by its ancient Buddhist philosophy. During this period of over thirty seven years, I enjoyed freedom and had the opportunity to observe this nation as it grew. Despite the many problems that confront it, India has stuck to her democratic principles. Today, India is self-sufficient, economically vibrant and the world's largest democracy. It is a force to be reckoned with not only within Asia, but on the world stage. Therefore, she can be a model for other nations and peoples who are still striving to build civil societies, by institutionalising democratic values, ensuring freedom of religion and finding strength in her diversity. India can also take the lead in formulating principled, courageous and imaginative policies on regional and international issues.

In 1959, when all was lost in Tibet and I had just arrived in India, Nehru assured me that the real way to serve the Tibetan cause was to give our children a proper education. Education is a universal panacea, as appropriate to India as it was to the Tibetan community then. If we want to improve the lot of women and the weaker sections of society, if we want to preserve our ancient heritage with its manifold traditions in the face of modernity, if we want to preserve the environment whilst raising people's living standards, the solution lies in supporting education and extending it laterally.

However, education is like an instrument, the positive or negative use of which depends entirely on the wielder. It is the same with our intelligence, depending on our motivation. Intelligence is one of our unique human endowments. But since humans have often misused it, it has also, at times, been a source of great trouble. The only guarantee of the proper use of human intelligence, however, is to have a good heart.

It is important that education seeks not to be solely a problem-solving mechanism for onself but also inculcates the right kind of motivation and responsibility in young people, in other words, a sense of universal responsibility. Negative human behaviour and disruptive activities are the result of our not being truly aware of reality. So, when it comes to education, I think that teachers must concern themselves with both training of the mind as well as training to have a good heart. Both are equally important. But perhaps, cultivating a good heart is even more important, because whatever education you have gained can be put to good use if you have already cultivated a good heart.

Human beings have both the ability and the means to solve their own problems and that of others. Yet humanity faces many problems which are actually self-created. Clearly, something is missing and I believe that what it is, is right motivation and a broad perspective. Our short-sightedness and ignorance create suffering and we act in ways that have negative consequences, both for ourselves as well as for others.

The need for a sense of universal responsibility can be seen clearly especially in the area of modern economic relations, which extend beyond national boundaries. Global relationships require a sense of global responsibility. For instance, no single nation can solve the problem of global environmental degradation. We cannot solve our problems in isolation. A sense of universal responsibility entails a deeper awareness of reality. It is not merely a question of morality or ethics, but a question of our own survival. Whether we believe in religion or not, whether we support this ideology or that, we are all human beings and are part of the human family. The future of humanity depends on us and consequently we are responsible for it. Contemporary access to modern science and technology has increased our ability to affect each other's lives and promote our own. It is not wrong to have a sense of your own self. Without a strong sense of who you are, you cannot develop self-confidence and determination. But most of the time the self is so narrow-minded that it manifests as extreme selfishness which can lead to self-destruction.

In order to eliminate that kind of negative outlook, we need to realise that our own interests are closely linked with the interests of others. In reality, the benefits, happiness and interests of others are our own. If we disregard the rights and concerns of others, we will suffer as only the lonely can. We see this at the community and family levels and at national and international levels. This sense of concern for others is the key factor in our own happiness and future successes.

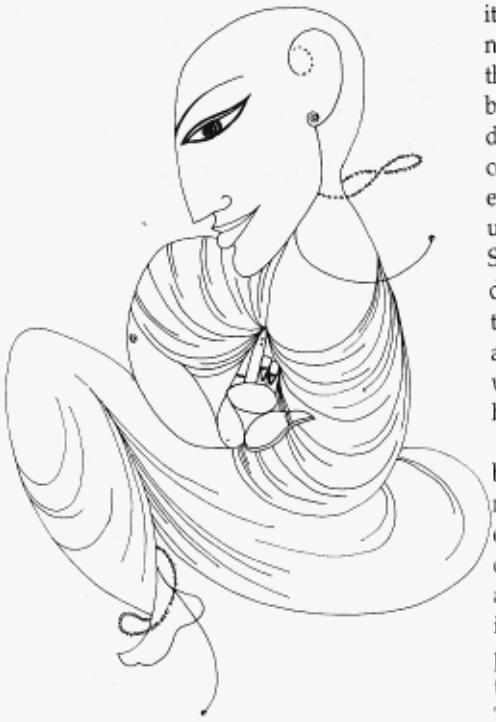
Everybody in this country has heard of ahimsa or non-violence. But non-violence does not mean the mere absence of violence. It is something more positive and meaningful. The fuller expression of non-violence is compassion. Some people have the impression that compassion is something akin to pity, but that is to misunderstand it. Genuine compassion is a feeling of closeness, respect and responsibility to mankind. True compassion grows when we accept others as being just like us, beings who want happiness and do not want suffering. Once we develop that kind of compassion, we see that it applies to all human beings, including our so-called enemies, those people who disturb our minds or hurt us. Usually, our compassion or love is biased. It is a feeling we extend only towards our friends, not towards people we don't know, and especially not towards those we see as our enemies. That is not genuine compassion.

People are often under the impression that love, compassion and forgiveness are 'religious' subjects, and that only 'believers' need think about them. But I wonder if anyone can dismiss our need for compassion and love. As long as we are humans, we need them. I have often remarked that although we may be free from religion at the time of our birth, we are not free of the need for affection. We receive milk from our mother from the very first day of our life and we would not have survived without it. Religion comes later and without it we can still manage and survive.

It is very important to make a distinction between religion and its specific beliefs and teachings and the universal qualities of compassion and love. We need love. We need to be cared for. And, in turn, we need to love and care for others. What seemed to be mere religious platitudes yesterday seems to be reality today. For example, if someone had said in the early part of this century, that we were all responsible for each other and our planet, nobody would have taken much notice. Now we realise that such advice is not so much a question of morality as of necessity. We are taking care of the environment today because it is *necessary* to do so. Our own survival is at stake.

People may have different religious backgrounds just by the fact of their birth, but they are not necessarily 'religious' in any real sense of the term. Because, while the main purpose of religion is spiritual transformation, people often treat religion as another way of obtaining something they want. I consider the essential purpose of our lives to be the cultivation of happiness and joy. Consequently, material development is important, but not at the expense of spiritual development. Unless our mental attitude is stable and calm, we often remain discontented and unhappy in spite of the best facilities that may be available to us.

All religions realise the importance of compassion and have a special role to play in awakening it. At the same time, compassion and forgiveness are qualities that are fundamentally human. They need have nothing to do with religion. The contemporary problems of humanity demand a positive mental attitude and a sense of compassion. Not all our problems



can be easily solved, but at least they can be reduced. Like the North – South divide, particularly in the sphere of economics. The rich, developed nations of the North have only been concerned with their own future and have used every opportunity to exploit the poorer countries of the South. Consequently, these developed countries are themselves facing problems because of the growing inter-dependence of our planet. Some of these problems include degradation of the global environment, terrorism, illegal migration, and so forth. In order to solve our environmental problems, rich countries cannot demand that poorer countries continue to live in poverty, while they consume most of the earth's resources and create most of its pollution. We have to consider the human costs both for the poor and the rich. The gap between the privileged and the deprived is found everywhere—even in developing countries like India.

I remember once staying in a large, comfortable hotel. Looking out of the window, I saw poor people working outside in the heat, while I was inside in air-conditioned comfort. At night, these people just sleep on the pavement. We have become so used to these contradictions that we eventually pay them no attention. Genuine human cooperation cannot be brought about by force. We need to take universal responsibility for our planet since it is a question of our own future. We just need to broaden our perspective. Today, there are many reasons to be optimistic. I believe humanity, having experienced death and destruction in the last few centuries, is becoming more mature. For example, war is no longer considered the ultimate option for settling conflicts. Similarly, the feeling that the development idiom can only flourish through rigid organisation and an authoritarian political system has given way to freedom and democracy which have become cherished concepts.

Nevertheless, in modern India, it has become rare for people to come out with new and original intitiatives to meet the challenges we face. Of course, we have to deal with day-to-day problems. But it is also very important to think of the larger issues. In ancient times there were many people in this country who took account of the world beyond the boundaries of India. Today, unless something happens within her own territory, India does not take the lead except when she is compelled to respond.

India is the source of several great spiritual traditions, each with its own techniques for developing a good heart. Therefore, India should take a more active role in directing the future of humanity, rather than concentrating only on her own problems. I often tell my Indian friends that what the country needs today is a fearless, selfless spirit such as the one which inspired the independence movement. As we approach the end of the twentieth century and embark on the twenty-first, I hope and pray that this nation and her people will set an example for the good of this world.

His Holiness Tenzin Gyatso is the Fourteenth Dalai Lama. The spiritual and temporal head of Tibet, he lives in Dharmasala, India, where he established the Tibetan Government in Exile. A peace activist, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989 in recognition of his philosophy and activities. Besides spreading the message of universal responsibility, he actively contributes towards the preservation of Tibet's higher arts and sciences.

Illustration: **Meera Naidu**

Poetry of War & Suffering

FROM THE NOT SO FIRST WORLD

SOUTH AFRICA

Soweto road

On this spot rough
from cares of slow years
on these streets
muddy from torrents red
on these crooked roads
yawning for direction
here where like early spring
awaiting rain's seeds
young voices stormed horizons
how yet like summer streams
young blood flowed over
flooded flower
in the dead of winter

On this road here
here this road here
tingles and shudders
from acid taste
the snakeskin snakestooth whiplash road where
snakes tongue flicker lick
broken glass children's park
road school for shoeless feet...
olympic track perfected
by daily daring sprints
against passes
and barbed wire nakedness...
this road pressed soft
oozing like tear-falls
treeless show-ground for hard-ware processions
all the June sixteen festivals
and their mad array of hippos
muffling contrary anthems
with machine gun chatter
naked greed and lust for blood in camouflage
Soweto road drunk
from rich red wine
this sweet arterial blood
for choice Aryan folk...
battlefield road here yes

Here
yes even here
where road-blocks to life pile
precariously
here we kneel
scoop earth raise mounds of hope
we oath
with our lives
we shall immortalize
each footprint left each grain of soil that flesh shed here
each little globe of blood
dropped in our struggle
upon the zigzag path of revolution...
Soweto blood red road
will not dry up
until the fields of revolution
fully mellow tilled
always to bloom again

Lindiwe Mabuza

Dedication

Mother of freedom Helen*
At seventy-three still a threat
What savagery aimed against her
Bullets, batons, shattering windows

Helen Joseph has defeated aggression,
Her soul is free from racial contamination,
Mother, lover of freedom
Dauntless as ever,
Look at her refusing bread in old age
Eating rock
With the downtrodden,
Her heart grows fonder, profounder

Her face is carved from steel
Her eye is gentle and brave
She enters the dock, stands still
Listens carefully: the indictment read...
It says nothing, nothing base about her
Not anything to brand her foe of the people,
The people she lovingly serves.
So she swallows and takes a deep breath.

We are winning the battle!
Down to the dark cell she strides
The Amanda trumpet behind her
Blowing, blowing, blowing...

Susan Lamu

* Helen Joseph, 75 in 1980, is one of the most dedicated consistent white South African freedom lovers.

All the poems on war and suffering carried in this issue of THE EYE have been selected and introduced by Gautam Haridas.

THE SURGING FLAME OF NON-VIOLENCE SINCE GANDHI

N. RADHAKRISHNAN

If you feel humiliated, you will be justified in slapping the bully in the face or taking whatever action you might deem necessary to vindicate your self-respect. The use of force, in the circumstances, would be the natural consequence if you are not a coward. But if you have assimilated the non-violent spirit, there should be no feeling of humiliation in you.

Gandhi, *Young India*, p.247

Though we can, without any hesitation, say that the twentieth century has witnessed unprecedented violence both in terms of scale and intensity, it has also witnessed large scale development of non-violent action. One of the major contributions of this century to human history has, in fact, been this global non-violent awakening. This awakening has been the result of the creative and daring roles played by several people who defied threats, death, punitive action and willingly accepted suffering and even long years of imprisonment.

These creative and daring people seem to have been nurtured in James Thurber's dictum, 'Let us not look back in anger or forward in fear but around in awareness'.

What is it that is being sought through this awakening? What kind of an awareness are we seeking? We seek an awareness and an awakening which appeals to the vast reservoir of the non-violent potential of the average human being. While this awakening would attempt to address the current lacunae of most of the non-violent alternatives today, it does not deal with the ways in which non-violence is experienced or understood even by its votaries. Mostly it is the physical side which is addressed and not the ramification of the debilitating and dehumanising aspects of violence. For example, human rights violations and denial of natural justice to millions of men and women in different parts of the world are yet to become the focus of non-violent initiatives.

In the Gandhian perspective, non-violence can be understood as that practised by the weak and that practised by the brave. To understand either forms of non-violence, we need to be aware of the ground realities which force the choice on willing or unwilling practitioners of non-violence. We are only stating the obvious when we painfully remember that over one billion human beings in different parts of the world are forced to live on an average income of less than 200 dollars a year. For these people, industrialisation has only meant denial of basic amenities, illiteracy and poor housing if any. Nobody seems to bother about the slums which are infernos of human misery; exploitation, be it that of human kind or of nature, has taken on such alarming proportions that nobody can now really gauge the extent of these damages. World population which is over five billion, now is about to reach six billion before we enter the twenty-first century. It is estimated that over 660 billion dollars are spent annually on lethal weapons. Even a fraction of this huge amount would help eliminate poverty from the earth. The two kinds of non-violence about which Gandhi spoke, namely the non-violence of the weak and non-violence of the brave are to be understood against this background. The non-violence of the weak would accept these facts with a kind of passivity and would suffer willingly, while the non-violence of the brave would stand up and fight for justice which is impossible unless social justice is ensured, and poverty is the denial of both natural justice and social justice.

The Gandhian perspective of non-violent human transformation is slowly and steadily receiving attention in varying degrees almost all over the world. A considerable number of social activists, freedom fighters, human rights activists, thinkers, political leaders and sometimes even those whose national economies would suffer on account of non-violence, have demonstrated their conviction that the non-violent option advocated by Gandhi needs serious attention. As a result of this positive development, humanity is assured of a re- examination of the Bismarckian notion of worshipping war as a wholesome hygiene that allowed human nature to be perked up when a civilisation was becoming too soft. The protagonists of this view believe that aggression is healthier than non-aggression, waging war definitely invigorates and it is genuinely positive to be aggressive.

Gandhi demolished this myth, though the significance of the Gandhian initiative was not immediately perceived. Let it also be remembered, that the industrialised

West as well as those in the developing world did not take Gandhi seriously, though there was some awareness about his views. The differences in the cultural context in which Gandhi worked and the difficulties of many others to see beyond their noses, delayed the international communities' recognition of the Gandhian strategy. As is fairly well known now, it was Martin Luther King who proclaimed that '... the Christian doctrine of love, operating through the Gandhian method of non-violence is perhaps one of the most potent weapons available to oppressed people in their struggle for freedom'. The international community, though, took these Gandhian and Kingian initiatives only as freak developments.

Non-violence, as Gandhi himself demonstrated, does not recognise failure or success as indices of its efficacy. Rather, it flows like an inevitable stream of nourishment and continues to generate waves. There are still, therefore, all over the world, several motivated groups or individuals who are active proponents of non-violent methods of fighting for justice.

Collective non-violent action initiated by Martin Luther King along Gandhian lines, is upheld with conviction and courage by activists who lead civil liberty movements all over the world. Kenneth Kaunda, Bishop Tutu, Julius Nyerere, Nelson Mandela, Ho Chi Min, Aung San Suu Kyi are only a few of the most illustrious names to remember in this context. The co-option of such a method in the Green Movement, brings in a new dimension into green activism. Petra Kelly was a noteworthy example. The impact of the Gandhian model has spread to countries in Eastern Europe as much as that of the Quakers in the Latin American region. Others like Gene Sharp and Johan Galtung sustained a critical interest in and offered an academic input to theories of non-violence. Professor Glen D. Paige was among those who were instrumental in bringing into the scene, a whole generation of young researchers and peace activists by offering them an appropriate framework to understand, analyse and research the various aspects of non-violence. His herculean efforts to develop a critique of non-violent political science is an important phase in modern history. Among those inspired by Professor Paige are several young scholars of international repute and names to reckon with. Dr. Chaiwat Satha Anand, Dr. Lou Ann Guanson, Professor George Simson, Professor Sikander Mehdi are only a few names.

Bishop Tutu

Julius Nyerere

Ariyaratne

Glen Paige

Ovide Mecredi

A. T. Ariyaratne (Sri Lanka), Mrs. Bagoes Oka (Indonesia), Shrimati Kamala, Michael True and Lester Kurtz (USA), Daniello Dolci (Italy), Sulak Sivaraksa (Thailand), Peter Ruhe (Germany), Stephen Murphy (Australia) and Elis Sarid (Israel) are some of the outstanding names that will be remembered for their creative adaptation of the Gandhian mode to suit the needs and issues facing their countries.

Interestingly, several institutions that enshrine and propagate theories of non-violence have sprung up in recent times. Mention may be made of two important new initiatives. One, the Gandhi Canadian Foundation for World Peace with its headquarters in Edmonton, Canada, and two, the Centre for Global Non-violence at Honolulu, Hawaii, by Professor Glenn Paige.

Soka Gakkai International, under its redoubtable President Dr. Daisaku Ikeda, has been interpreting the frontiers of non-violence through youth exchange programmes, cultural festivals, exhibitions, dialogue diplomacy, publications and other educational programmes. The bold initiative taken by the International Peace Research Association in selecting *non-violence* as the central theme for its sixteenth General Conference last year at Brisbane is a significant step.

An event which did not receive much international attention are the efforts taken by Ovide Mercredi, Grand Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, Canada, to initiate non-violent alternatives among those who were becoming restive on account of the failure of governments in honouring accords and treaties. The Conference of Representatives of the First Nations Peoples which Mercredi called last October at Vancouver was a major step towards conflict management along Gandhian lines.

The odds before humanity appear to be unscaleable. From physical and religious violence, we have now moved on to economic violence which is even more deadly. It is in this context that UNESCO'S declaration of the year 2000 as the year of non-violence assumes the greatest importance.

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Photos: Courtesy **Dr. N. Radhakrishnan**, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti, New Delhi

Painting by **Rekha Rodwittiya**, *Walk Tall Too*, Courtesy: Sahmat

Trial and Punishment

USHA RAMANATHAN

This essay examines various types of responses to perpetrators of political crimes such as war and apartheid. While the Tokyo War Trial of 1946–48, like Nuremberg, largely resorted to capital punishment, the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission which came into being in 1995 places a premium on forgiveness and reconciliation. Based on these two examples, the author pleads for a judicial alternative that would intervene in violent situations without itself resorting to violence.

It was after the mushroom cloud had cleared away that the judges trooped into the auditorium of the old Japanese War Ministry. There were eleven of them, one each from Australia, Canada, China, France, Great Britain, India, the Netherlands, New Zealand, the Philippines, the Soviet Union and the United States. The Marshall declared, 'The International Military Tribunal for the Far East is in session and is ready to hear any matter brought before it'. It was 3 May 1946 and the Tokyo trial had begun.

It was a trial of 'major war criminals'. There were twenty-eight of them arraigned before the Tribunal. There was General Tojo Hideki, Prime Minister and War Minister of Japan when Pearl Harbour was bombed. Fourteen of the twenty-eight had been generals in the Imperial Japanese Army. Seven of these had been War Ministers, and nine had held wartime commands. There were admirals, career diplomats, bureaucrats, a politician and a propagandist standing trial. They were charged with having conspired to wage aggressive war, and with having carried this conspiracy into action. They were charged with ordering, authorising or permitting atrocities. They were charged with disregard of duty since they failed to secure the observance of the laws of war, or prevent its breach.

Richard Minear, *Victor's Justice: The Tokyo War Crimes Trial*

An international representation of justices pose on the opening day of the Tokyo Trial 1946 – 48

The trial ended in November 1948. Seven men were sentenced to death by hanging, and on 23 December 1948, the condemned men were hanged. Two of the defendants died during the trial. Eighteen men were sentenced to varying terms of imprisonment, sixteen of them for life.

On 21 November 1950, Shigemitsu Mamoru, sentenced to imprisonment for seven years, left the prison after having served four years and seven months. Four years later, Shigemitsu was again the Foreign Minister, and he was negotiating the release of the remaining prisoners of the Tokyo trial. The curtain fell on the trial when, on 7 April 1958, the ten surviving men were unconditionally released.

There is more. Richard Minear writes in his book, *Victor's Justice: The Tokyo War Crimes Trial* (1971), 'Trials for war crimes were a conspicuous feature of the post-war world. In Europe, the Nuremberg Tribunal was only the most famous of many trials. In the Pacific as well, the Tokyo trial was only one of many. Some 5700 Japanese were tried on conventional war crime charges, and 920 of these men were executed'.

The Tokyo trial has been criticised because it tried the accused for crimes against peace and humanity. These were not crimes defined in international law when they were purportedly committed by the accused. And retrospective creation of offences (that the deed has been done), is contrary to the rule of law. This appears to have weighed with Justice Radha Pal, the Indian judge on the bench, when he dissented from the rest.

Moreover, the trial, conducted in the immediate aftermath of the war by the victors, was prejudiced by a pre-determined assumption of guilt, and by the overpowering desire to mete out punishment for the atrocities the war had witnessed. There was also the confidence of being on the right side of a cause. There is little doubt that the aggression and the inhumanity of the war was real, that it was important that it be seen in its starkness and that it be held up to public view. There could be no question about the significance of identifying the aggressor, and of giving the victims their due by seeing justice done. Yet, were there no alternatives to condemning men to their death?

Massacre at Sharpeville, South Africa

Among the institutions which hold state power, it is the judiciary which is the least aggressive. Its process is non-violent. It is constructed to provide room for deliberation, and for understanding the nature of action, and inaction. It is meant to restore and preserve humanity. How then is such an institution used to authorise the violence of the death sentence?

Then, has the extraordinary trial and punishment in the Tokyo trial deterred others from practising aggression? It appears not. For aggression has neither disappeared, nor even diminished in its magnitude. And among the more prominent practitioners of aggression are those who sat in judgment at the Tokyo trial. The Vietnam War, which prompted Minear to revisit and assess the Tokyo trial, is merely one illustration. The threatening postures being adopted to bring Iraq to heel is another case in point.

It requires compassion, and a politics that does not exclude any of a state's people, to come up with an imaginative alternative. As a committed attempt at recording the past, crediting the victim's version, placing a premium on forgiveness and reconciliation, and outlawing retribution, the South African approach stands virtually alone. It is unusual to find the language of truth and reconciliation so embedded in the law. The Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act that the South African Parliament enacted in 1995 is an exception. The law is its narrative, and I will leave it to speak its own tale.

The experience of apartheid is littered with violence—violence practised as a measure of control, as an assertion of power, as retaliation, as defence and, after a while, as a routine aspect of political existence. The end of apartheid inevitably had losers and winners. The power of the state passed hands. The past had to be contended with; it could not be wished away, yet entrenched practices of punishment would be anachronistic. Further, the end of the apartheid regime did not mean that the differences, or the bitterness of defeat, or the insecurity of the populations would automatically disappear. So the South African leadership drew upon its wisdom to construct a paradigm that would be relevant to reconciling populations.

As is explained in the prelude to the law, the purpose was to draw as complete a picture as possible of the nature, causes and extent of the gross violations of human rights that emanated from the conflicts of the past. It was thought to be necessary to establish the truth in relation to past events, to identify the motives behind the violations, and to understand the circumstances in which they had occurred. Importantly, the findings are to be made known among the people to prevent a repetition of such acts in the future.

The law derives its inspiration from the Constitution of South Africa (1993), where it recognises that the pursuit of national unity, the well-being of all South African citizens, as well as peace, require reconciliation between the people of South Africa and reconstruction of society. '[T]here is a need for understanding but not for vengeance, a need for reparation but not for retaliation, a need for *ubuntu* but not for victimisation.' With these worthy ends in view, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, a Committee on Human Rights Violations, a Committee on Amnesty and a Committee on Reparation and Rehabilitation have been established.

Hearing the victim's version is an important part of the process of arriving at the truth. It is equally a necessary aspect of healing. Affording victims an opportunity to relate the violations they have suffered is one strand of victim–recognition. The South African law provides for these measures of reparation, even as it seeks to concern itself with the restoration of human and civil dignity of victims. And, it reaches out to those who have suffered physical or mental injury, as also to those who have

experienced emotional suffering—a manner of suffering that, alas, remains all too often beyond the understanding of law!

Generally, courts and tribunals adopt the adversarial system. Adversaries, with conflicting interests, work at convincing the judges to accept their statement as the truth. In a criminal trial, where the accused is charged with an offence, his interest is inevitably in denying the occurrence, or, at least, in denying his involvement. All too often, the trauma of the victim is aggravated by the disbelief, or, at best, partial credibility that meets the victim's narrative of the violations.

In the South African experiment, forgiveness is linked with the truthful and complete statement of what happened. The offender is encouraged to confess, and amnesty from prosecution is intricately connected with making a full disclosure. Interestingly, reparation for the harm that the victim suffered is described as including 'any form of compensation, ex gratia payment, restitution, rehabilitation or recognition.'

Coming to terms with a violent and repressive past is no easy task. Relegating violence to the past and countering the memory of violations with understanding and forgiveness, is not easy, either. There are bound to be problems that confront the participants in the process. We hear of past leaders refusing to testify before the Commission despite serious allegations against them; this, naturally, skews the proceedings. We hear of the braggado of the violators who hide from public disgrace behind bullying banter. There are the victims who resent the amnesty given to confessed offenders who were the cause of their trauma and loss—watching them walk away scot free after boasting of their 'achievements' must indeed be hard on the victims!

Yet, the significance of experimenting with a process that relies on truth, forgiveness and reconciliation, in a world torn by violent conflict, is remarkable. The twentieth century has had its share of meeting violence with violence while purportedly seeking peace. The morality of retaliatory violence is difficult to sustain, particularly since aggression, war or the politics of hate invariably cause widespread suffering, often to the innocent. Emulating an adversary seems a pitiful way of attempting to reduce the suffering and harm that the adversary causes. It is possible that the South African experience may hold many lessons for those seeking peace through peace.

A postscript is in order—while the country readjusted to its altered equations in the post-apartheid era, South Africa's Constitutional Court declared the death penalty to be unconstitutional. The state would no longer use the law to judge the right of a person to remain alive. It was one more step in distancing the conduct of the lawgiver from that of the person who broke the law. A brutal act would no longer be answered with brutality.

There have been many truth commissions around the world. Priscilla Hayner[1], researching truth commissions, has identified at least fifteen that were established between 1974 and 1994—in Uganda, Bolivia, Argentina, Uruguay, Zimbabwe, the Philippines, Chile, Chad, Germany, El Salvador, Rwanda, Ethiopia and in South Africa. Acknowledging the complexity of truth commissions, particularly in its politics, she yet says, 'officially establishing the truth about the past can be critical to a society's coming to terms with a period of widespread abuses. In many conflicts, the demand to end impunity, to recognise the suffering of victims, and to write a fair history of a battered past demands that the global truth be fairly established.'

In India, we have had the Andhra Pradesh High Court (1996), suggest that '[a] peace commission, with a representative character inspiring confidence in all sections of the society including the naxalites and the police and backed by state power and consent ... can bring about immediate cessation of police encounters and violence by naxalites.' In the resultant peaceful atmosphere, a meaningful search for permanent solutions is possible.'

In the meantime, the United Nations deliberates on establishing an International Criminal Court to deal with such crimes as genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. The wrongs will be defined. The rights of the accused spelt out. The witnesses and victims protected. And it is probable that the death penalty will be abjured.

Perhaps this could represent a judicial alternative that would intervene in violent situations without itself resorting to violence?

In the midst of the violence that rends the world then, the search for peace is on.

Winnie Mandela at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, South Africa

The search for an end to impunity is on. The search for giving a voice to the victim is on.

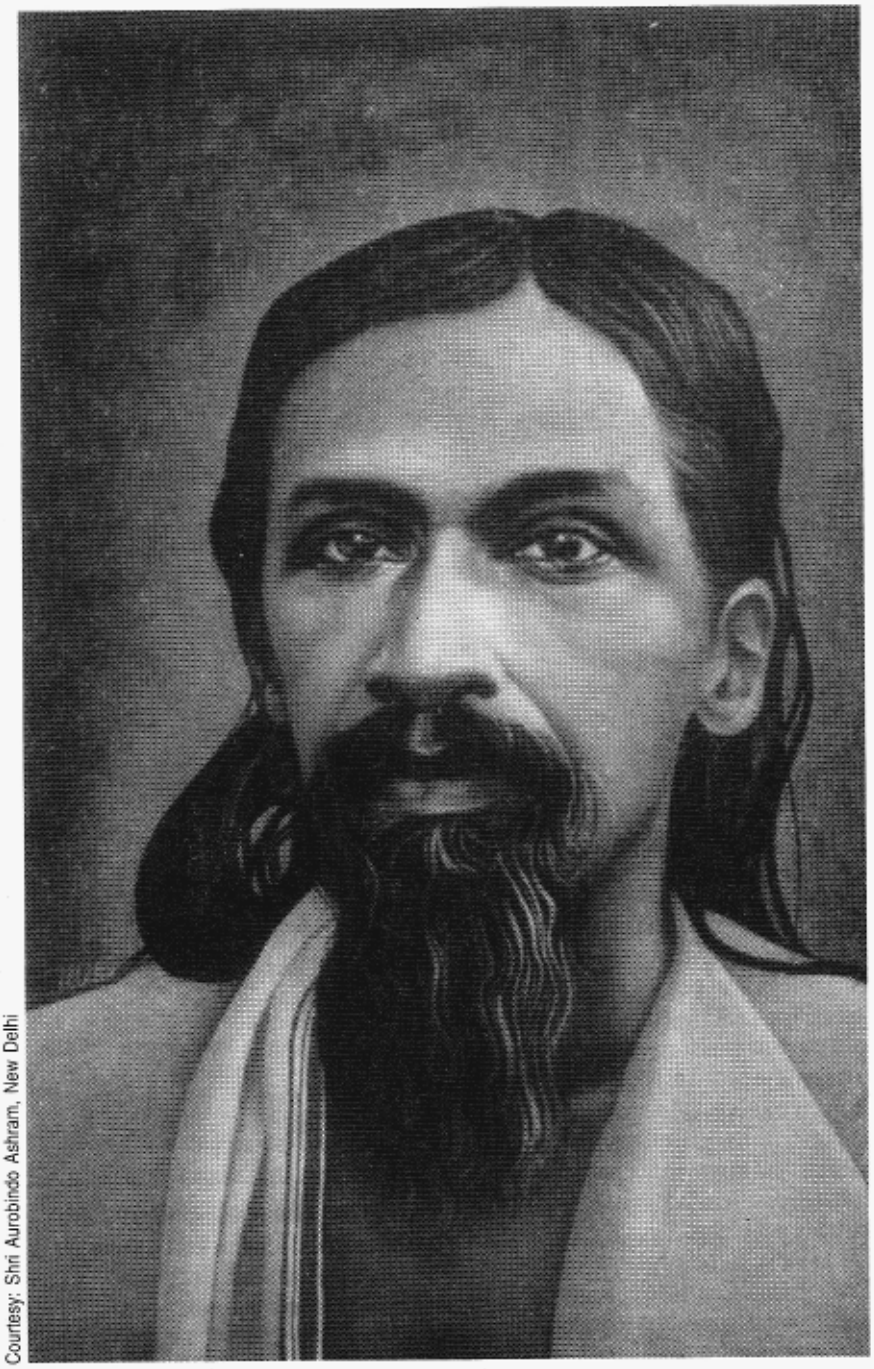
Note

[1] 'Fifteen Truth Commissions–1974 to 1994: A Comparative Study' (1994), *16 Human Rights Quarterly*, pp. 597-655

Usha Ramanathan researches and writes on law and poverty. She has worked on issues of forestry, gender, disaster law, children, institutionalisation and displacement.

FOUNDATIONS OF INDIAN CULTURE BY SRI AUROBINDO

A COMMENTARY BY MAKARAND PARANJAPE



Courtesy: Shri Aurobindo Ashram, New Delhi

The Foundations of Indian Culture is a text made up by collecting three series of essays by Sri Aurobindo which originally appeared in the quarterly ***Arya*** *from December 1918 to January 1921. The series consisted of three themes:* ***Is India Civilised?, A Rationalistic Critique on Indian Culture*** *and* ***A Defence of Indian Culture.*** *Another essay,* ***Indian Culture and External Influence****, published in the* ***Arya*** *of March 1919 was also included in the book. The book was first published in 1953 by the Aurobindo Library, New York.*

What follows is an edited transcript of Makarand Paranjape's talks on the book, delivered at the Aurobindo Ashram, New Delhi, during the Sunday ***satsang****. All quotations are from the SABCL facsimilie edition published by the Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry. In this, the 125th birth anniversary of Sri Aurobindo, THE EYE will serialise Paranjape's commentaries on the subsequent chapters of the book.*

Courtesy: Pradumna Tana

Indian civilisation's leit motif is religion

Part 2, Section 1

The Foundations of Indian Culture is Sri Aurobindo's extended exploration and, in some sense, defence of Indian culture in the face of several hostile attacks made at the beginning of the century. The immediate provocation was a diatribe by drama critic William Archer. The spirited and pathbreaking response to Archer's now more or less forgotten work forms the basis of Aurobindo's book.

Aurobindo's observations on Indian culture are relevant even today. Whether we like it or not, we are basically engaged in a long drawn cultural or civilisational conflict with the West, which involves basically two different viewpoints about the meaning of human life. As Aurobindo says, on the one hand, we have what is basically a materialistic culture which believes in a gradual, incremental improvement of material life here on earth through the use of modern science and civic government based on certain rational principles; on the other hand, the aim of Indian civilisation is essentially to realise the innate potential of every human being to achieve divinity

In any situation of conflict there is tremendous interchange and exchange. Several Indians westernise themselves and, in a sense, lose themselves in the prevailing norms of an 'international' culture. This dominant culture is basically outward, materialistic and regards the phenomenal world as all too real and also considers science as the means of describing and understanding it. This is one aspect of the interchange; the other aspect is that there is a growing disaffection, dissatisfaction and disaffiliation with precisely these trends within the West itself. Thus, there are large numbers of people in the West who are looking for an alternative, who have begun to realise that basically materialism is a dead end.

That is why we are poised at a very interesting juncture, where one is likely to find that there is a greater interest in, and respect for spiritual traditions in the West than in India. There, they have actually faced the fruits of over-affluence, whereas we, who have gone through centuries of poverty, crave for just that affluence, though we realise, that in addition to being a physical, vital and psychic being, the human is basically a spiritual being. It is an inevitable truth, that until one finds one's destiny, until whatever is natural within us is manifested, the quest will continue. This is the spiritual and yogic standpoint from which Aurobindo examines the aforementioned cultural conflict.

After sketching out his basic ideas in *Part I — Is India Civilised?* where he says that of course, India is civilised by whatever standards one may use; in Part 2, he is actually turning his gaze towards the critic William Archer himself, and the type of criticism which he represents. Here, it is very important to understand that Aurobindo is one of the greatest critics that India has produced in this century.

What do we mean by a critic? At the most basic level, we mean a sort of literary critic, somebody who can analyse a text, tell us what it means, help us understand the meaning of that text and interpret it. But a critic is more than just that. A critic is somebody who can distinguish what is superior and what is inferior. In other words, he or she can make a judgement. A critic is not just someone who elucidates and comments on a text but somebody who can actually offer us yardsticks for judging it.

Aurobindo, by training, was an expert in literary analysis. He had received a liberal arts education at King's College, Cambridge and had a scholarship in the Classics. He is one of our greatest poets. So criticism comes naturally to him. But what is interesting in this section, the first in Part 2 of the book, is that he actually tells us about the different genres of criticism. So, he is, in a sense, critiquing criticism itself, trying to establish for us a theoretical foundation of what constitutes criticism—not just textual criticism but what we today call 'cultural criticism'; not just how we criticise a text, but how we understand or judge another culture, what are the bases of that judgement, what kind of critiques are available, and so on.

What he says in this section is that criticism, in fact, is an important and responsible activity. It should be treated with a certain respect because without criticism we cannot grow. But at the same time, there are certain norms which need to be adhered to, otherwise criticism becomes counterproductive. Aurobindo is talking about these very norms.

In the Indian tradition we always have a *purva paksha* and then the *uttara paksha*. In the generosity of our spirit we want first to concede, give credit to the best that our opponent has to offer before we offer our arguments. This is something we have completely forgotten in modern times. Instead, we usually indulge in name-calling and slander to discredit our opponents, calling into question their characters, intentions and motives. We take neither their arguments nor criticism seriously.

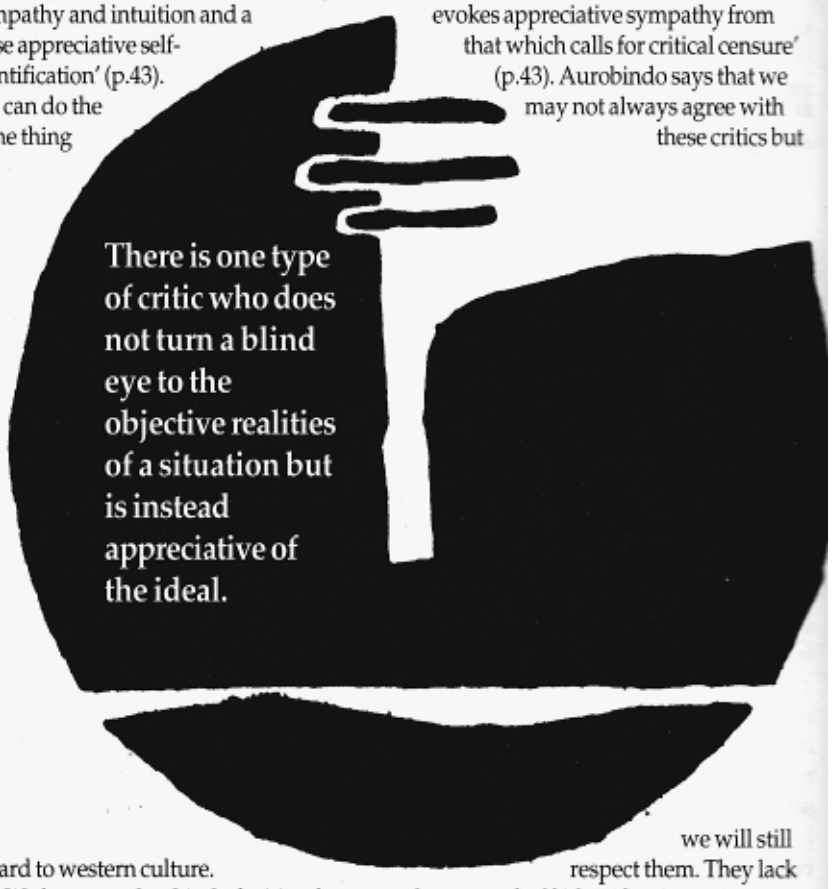
Aurobindo starts by saying that when we have grown up in a certain culture, we take it for granted and often become blind to its faults. We never bother to examine it carefully. He says, 'When we try to appreciate a culture, and when that culture is the one in which we have grown up or from which we draw our governing ideals and are likely from over-familiarity to minimise its deficiencies or from over-familiarity to miss aspects or values of it which would strike an unaccustomed eye, it is always useful as well as interesting to know how others see it'(p. 43).

So right at the beginning, he says, we should not be afraid of criticism. We do not want to be a culture which attacks anyone who criticises it. This kind of culture has no self-confidence. Aurobindo does not think that anybody who critiques us should be banned. We get defensive the moment something unflattering is said about us and we start criticising, attacking and abusing that person. Instead, Aurobindo believes that it is interesting to understand how someone else looks at us. So, again and again, we see this tremendous inner confidence that Aurobindo has in his culture.

Not only that—he was not insecure even when he did not know much about. When he returned to India from abroad, he practically knew not a single Indian language though he was proficient in Greek, Latin and English literature. Yet he had an intuitive connection with India which he felt at a level much deeper than the level of the mind. He says that the moment he returned to India, at Apollo Bunder, the Gateway of India, Mumbai, a palpable peace descended on him which never ever left him.

After that, when he was in the service of the Gaekwad of Baroda, he actually undertook to educate himself about Indian civilisation. He learnt Sanskrit, read the classics (he was and continues to be one of the foremost interpreters of the *Vedas*), read the *Upanishads*, wrote a commentary on the *Gita*, learnt a bit of Bengali and so on. More than that though, his own inner development as a *yogi* gave him a tremendous inner confidence which could not be shaken. In contrast, we are shaken so easily! A gust of wind blows us off our feet; we get uprooted and dislodged.

But Aurobindo actually asks us to welcome criticism. He then begins to discuss different kinds of critics. There are those, he says, who are very sympathetic to a culture, who try and take you to the very heart and soul of that culture. Sister Nivedita's *Web of Human Life*, Mr. Fielding's book on Burma and Sir John Woodroffe's studies on the Tantra are some examples. People like Sister Nivedita or Sir John Woodroffe (to some extent, Annie Besant and Max Mueller may also be placed in this category) have made India their own and therefore, give you a very sympathetic portrayal. These are what he calls sympathetic critics: 'There is the eye of sympathy and intuition and a close appreciative self-identification' (p.43). We can do the same thing with regard to western culture.



We have another kind of critic who attempts at having what Aurobindo calls a total vision. These critics are not blind to the faults of a particular society. So they would not be blind to the poverty of India, the mismanagement, the lawlessness, the uncleanliness, the lack of civic amenities, the irregularity of the services, the unreliability of the administration, and so on, but still be appreciative of what India stands for. That is, one does not turn a blind eye to the objective realities of a situation but is instead appreciative of the ideal.

These and the following are overlapping categories. They are not mathematically precise. What Aurobindo wishes to do at this juncture is merely to elucidate the different types of criticism before he zeroes in on William Archer.

Aurobindo calls the third type of critic a 'discerning and dispassionate critic', who basically does not have any special sympathy for a culture. A sympathetic critic cannot be dispassionate; so he will describe whatever he sees favourably. A dispassionate critic, on the other hand, will try and balance 'merit and defect, success and failure, mark off that which evokes appreciative sympathy from that which calls for critical censure' (p.43). Aurobindo says that we may not always agree with these critics but we will still respect them. They lack the sense of self-identification or intuition that we expect from a *sahridaya*, that is, someone who is a good critic because he occupies the same heart-space as the writer. Aurobindo says there are some who will have no intuitive appreciation for India, but because they are discerning and dispassionate we can still learn from them.

Then, there is the hostile critic, 'convinced of the inferiority of the culture in question, who gives plainly and honestly, without deliberate

overcharging, what he conceives to be sound reason for his judgement' (p.43-4). Such critics are antipathetic to India. There is no real reason to be offended by them because they are very honest. They have placed their cards on the table telling us why they do not like this culture. In turn, we may, after having looked at these reasons, not agree, or agree to disagree, but nonetheless, willingly grant them the freedom to their opinion. Aurobindo says, though we may disagree with them, we can learn to appreciate standpoints which are different from ours. We can learn that there are people who think diametrically the opposite of what we think, and possibly we may garner wisdom, insight and sympathy might grow from such comparisons. So he does not rule out the possibility of learning something even from a hostile critic.

Finally he comes toWilliam Archer. He says Archer does not belong to any of these categories, because though he is a hostile critic, he is not an honestly hostile one. In other words, he is hostile, but there is an ulterior motive. What is William Archer trying to do? First, his book has a political object: 'It started with the underlying idea that India must be proved altogether barbarous in order to destroy or damage her case for self-government' (p.44). Aurobindo says that such an 'extraneous motive at once puts his whole pleading out of court; for it means a constant deliberate distortion in order to serve a material interest, foreign altogether to the disinterested intellectual objects of cultural comparison and criticism' (p.44). Aurobindo condemns the book as 'a journalistic fake, not an honest critical production' (p.45). It is interesting to see how carefully he establishes the different types of criticism before placing William Archer where he belongs!

After discussing the genre of criticism that William Archer represents, Aurobindo makes a sarcastic barb about fame. About Archer, he says, 'one concludes that either he must have used a very different method in dealing with European literature, or else it is very easy to get a reputation of this kind in England' (p.46). In other words, how has Archer come to acquire such a reputation ? This could only be because the kind of standards he is using to critique and attack Indian culture are

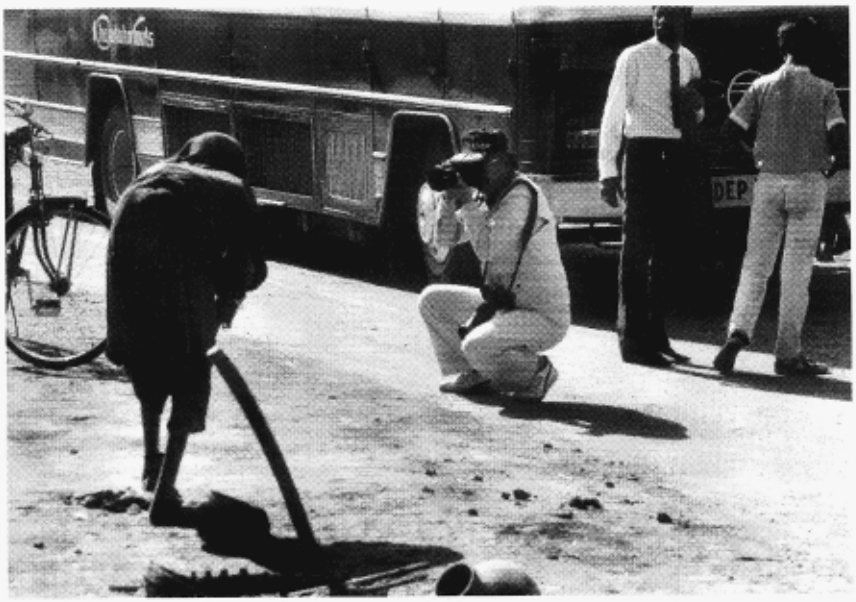
It is interesting to see how carefully he establishes the different genres of criticism before placing William Archer where he belongs!

very different from the standards he is using when he critiques European drama, else who would consider him a respectable critic in England? There is possibly another reason. Perhaps journalistic fame comes quickly if one can write invective with ease and this is even simpler to do if one is very clever and glib. Twentieth-century journalism is replete with such examples. Aurobindo alludes to this trend here.

It is certainly not our intention to discredit all Europeans who critique or discuss India says Aurobindo. He proceeds to pick out an example for each area that Archer critiques, which is not just Indian drama, but also Indian metaphysics, religion, culture, dance, painting and sculpture, and contrasts him with one or two other western critics. For example, in Philosophy, he says, one need not look only at John Woodroffe's 'unnamed English professor' or Dr. Gough, but also at Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Emerson, Cousins or Schlegel. In Art, there are Laurence Binyon or Okakura, and so on. He places a standard, reputed non-Indiancommentator for each of Archer's areas of criticism, showing the weight and substance of their arguments. By contrast, Archer does not show competence in any of these categories; he is just not knowledgeable enough about India even to start critiquing it.

Aurobindo gives us an example of Archer's line of argument. For instance, he says that Hinduism is altogether barbaric and Christanity is better, and why—'mainly, it seems, because Christians do not seriously believe in their own religion—let not the reader laugh, the book advances quite seriously this amazing reason...' (pp.45– 6). It is better because nobody takes it seriously! In other words, what Archer hates is religion. He is really against a civilisation which is based on religion, on abstractions and truths which are not secular. Reason alone is supreme, and a secular society is the only kind of society which can approximate to any kind of civilisation. What Archer says about the *Ramayana* is another example of his type of criticism. Why does he not like the *Ramayana*? Because Rama is too virtuous to be taken seriously!

We get several other instances of the 'damned if you do and damned if you don't' attitude of Archer's. Aurobindo shows him to be not just a carping, but a contradictory critic, one who showers praise and blame indiscriminately and often for the wrong reasons. Archer is hostile, he is ignorant, egotistical and confused. If he is all these things, why does Aurobindo take him so seriously?



Gurinder Osan

Is India so barbarous that it is incapable of self governance?

We only have to look carefully to see that Aurobindo is actually trying to extract something valuable from a seemingly useless kind of attack like Archer's. He says: 'There is much in his writing that expresses crudely, but still with sufficient accuracy, the feeling of recoil of the average occidental mind at its first view of the unique characteristics of Indian culture and that is a thing worth noting and sounding…' (p.49).

Aurobindo is about to make a very important point. He focuses so painstakingly on William Archer because he feels that 'through all this unpleasant crudity we can arrive at the essence of a historic misunderstanding of continents' (p.49). An average mind can reveal more to an observer than a sophisticated mind: 'The cultured mind tends to diminish the force of these prejudices or at least, even in difference and opposition, to develop points of similarity or of contact' (p.49). Aurobindo's refutation, then, is addressed to that 'average' European mindset. He wishes to educate this mind of Europe, so that its misconceptions and prejudices may be reduced.

Ultimately, Aurobindo's yoga is not just for Indians, it is for everybody. He is one of the greatest synthesisers of this century. He constantly explored the possibility of a fruitful contact with the western mind. The supramental age is an inclusive one, and in order to synthesise and include all people, however different, in his yoga, Aurobindo is opening out, saying, let us take even the most useless criticism and see if it reveals a fundamental misunderstanding and lack of communication between two great cultures of the world.

Today, in the information age, data is power, and communication is the most important thing. Most of the problems of the world can be traced to a communication breakdown. But real communication takes place when you cull something useful even from adverse criticism. And that, precisely, is Aurobindo's approach to William Archer's book.

Illustrations: **Oroon Das**

Culturemulch

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Poetry of War & Suffering

FROM THE NOT SO FIRST WORLD

EASTERN EUROPE

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Mother

Have you ever watched your old mother
making up the bed for you,
how she pulls, straightens, tucks in
and smoothes the sheet
so you won't feel a single wrinkle?
Her breathing, the motion of her
hands and palms
are so loving
that in the past they are putting out
that fire in Persepolis
and now calming some future storm
off the China coast or in unknown
seas.

Vladimir Holan

POLAND

He is Gone

The finger of death touched me,
the world tumbled down
on me.

I am lying under the rubble,
hands broken,
legs broken,
backbone mangled.

People are passing
at a distance.
I call. They do not hear,
They have passed. I am dying.

The dearest man arrives.
He looks for a moment. Does not
understand anything.
Leaves.

He is tenderhearted,
he is gone to comfort others.

Anna Swirszczynska

POLAND

Pigtail

When all the women in the transport
had their heads shaved
four workmen with brooms made of
birch twigs
swept up
and gathered up the hair

Behind clean glass
the stiff hair lies
of those suffocated in gas chambers
there are pins and side combs
in this hair

The hair is shot through with light
is not parted by the breeze
is not touched by any hand
or rain or lips

In huge chests
clouds of dry hair
of those suffocated
and a faded plait
a pigtail with a ribbon
pulled at school
by naughty boys.

Tadeusz Rozewicz

All the poems on war and suffering carried in this issue of THE EYE have been selected and introduced by Gautam Haridas.

POLAND

Pawiak 1943

It was exactly eleven
steps from wall to wall
in the Pawiak Prison*
from to from to
wall wall wall wall
and eleven and back again

I walked this

till today
for so many cramped years
if I set out
then I begin
with the twelfth step

Jerzy Ficowski

*Pawiak was the Nazi prison in Warsaw, now a war memorial and museum.

YUGOSLAVIA (SERBO-CROAT)

Be Seeing You

After the third evening round
In the yard of the concentration camp
We disperse to our quarters

We know that before dawn
Some of us will be taken out and shot

We smile like conspirators
And whisper to each other
Be seeing you

We don't say when or where

We've given up the old way
We know what we mean

Vasco Popa

THE PLAYERS

The Amalgamate Management

Once a little ahead in the present, the world faced a strange dilemma, God outpaced everything. All the time. It was frustrating. The Ego, in abundant supply across the planet, was miffed. So the Management offered a challenge to God in the form of a seminar. Their plan was to first somehow extract God's secret and then show Him his rightful place in the Universe. However, even their best laid plans were constantly foiled.

Miss World

From India, was employed by the Management to act as a spy and find out God's secrets. She did. It was a special Speed. But since the Management was slow to react when she returned and generally missed the whole point, both Miss World and the secret slipped through their fingers and disappeared. When they realised their mistake it was too late and so a frantic hunt began.

Nachiketas

Immortal souls as we know, have a free passport into life whenever they want. Nachiketas, the young hero of the *Katha Upanishad*, who once earned three boons from Yama, the God of Death decided to return to earth. He landed in Calcutta and began life as a newspaper vendor. He read about Miss World's encounter with the God(s) and was intrigued. He wrote to her. They met, became friends. With his help, Miss World took a trip through the *Vedas* and *Upanishads*, encountering several ancient and modern seers, which helped her understand God's speed better. In turn she brought Nachiketas upto date with Star TV, Internet and the search for the God Particle. However, since the Amalgamate Management was after Miss World, both of them had to be on the run.

God

Singular or plural. Both or none according to demand. Having masterminded all the events, they watch the play of the world unfold. They act in various ways. They offer effective, though unconventional consultancy to Miss World. They even arrange things so that Nachiketas can help her further. At the same time God makes sure that the discontent of the Amalgamate Management is well fanned with furore, so that they never give up their search. Because God has a plan for them too …

A HUMAN RACE

ANU MAJUMDAR

The Story of Episode 3:

Strategic Summits

A week after Miss World disappeared, the Amalgamate Management announced a generous reward for truthful information on her whereabouts. Her parents' home in New Delhi was searched by cops, in vain. Despite their upsetting the entire household, her mother graciously served tea to them, all the while reading her daughter's fax concealed in a cookbook.

The next morning a small interview made the world sit up. An *Indian Times* reporter claimed to have spoken to God at Daryaganj. No one quite understood God's esoteric remarks about Miss World's location when he said, '... she is always with me'. And soon after, He hitched a lift and vanished. The Secretary General of the Security Council, on vacation at the seaside, read a slim volume lying on the sand at his side. It was the *Isha Upanishad*. He padded back to the hotel and faxed the eighteen verses of the book to his headquarters in New York.

Meanwhile, from his abode of concealment in the vast sky, God watched two figures as they meandered near the mountains. One of them was wearing heavy bifocals and pigtails. The other was wearing a very small ponytail and a two-day beard. They were Aditi, i.e Miss World and Nachiketas. They were hopelessly lost. Miss World looked at the line of white peaks in front of her and asked Nachiketas why he chose Saptarishi. He replied, ' So that we could get lost...Only when people are lost do they make an effort to find out what it's all about'. Aditi wondered if Saptarishi really existed, at which point Nachiketas slid off the road, deciding to take a shortcut.

A very important meeting was taking place meanwhile, at the UN headquarters. God had concealed himself among the stars and was watching.The Special Intelligence Committee (SIC) appointed by the Amalgamate Management decided that God had gone too far. The *Indian Times* reporter had to be discredited for publishing nonsense. Just then, God knocked at the door, disguised as a secretary and handed over the fax that had come in from the Secretary General. All eighteen verses were read out to the utter consternation of all those assembled there. No one could make head or tail of it. So a certain Mr. Guru's services were recruited to decipher the coded meanings. Mr. Guru's irreverent and wholly unwarranted sense of humour put them totally off balance and it led to his nearly being thrown out. And, just an hour later, when they looked for him, they could not find him at his address. In fact, such a person had never lived in that apartment block.

The Management lost patience.Two top commandos were recruited to capture Miss World at any cost. But all they could see was a lone man with an *ektara* in his hands. He was Krishna Baul. Would he know anything about the SIC secret? Highly unlikely. Nachiketas and Miss World were having tea at a little village teashop. Krishna Baul walked towards them, singing mystical Vaishnavite songs, thoroughly mystifying the crowd that had gathered around him. All three of them walked towards a temple nearby. Krishna Baul pointed towards the middle of the crowd. And there were two men there, who certainly didn't look like pilgrims. Alerted by their presence, Aditi and Nachiketas ducked into the crowd and vanished. They ran and ran and reached the banks of the river. 'That's where the mountain cracks', panted Aditi. 'Bravo', said Nachiketas.

# of running and standing

Episode 4

Miss World leads the way across a mysterious pass and finds out about the Fire of Nachiketas. The two spies from the Management discover a lead from an unlikely source and run around the hillside causing much concern. While the world plays cricket, the Management puts pressure on a reporter. A Brahmarishi hands Miss World an unusual computer chip. And God, as usual, interferes.

Crack of dawn.

A little ant was doing overtime during the early morning shift. It scurried around a huge sack that lay in a heap beside the grassy river bank. Finally, it bumped into an arm that lay carelessly out from the sack.

That was it.

The ant closed in on the elbow and delivered a stinging bite. The bite raced through the body inside the sack, jangling madly like an alarm clock. Miss World yelped, rolled over in her sleeping bag and sat up with a start, rubbing her elbow. Quickly the ant dived for cover and zittled away, its mission accomplished. Boss would be pleased.

A little further down the river bend, Nachiketas snored serenely in his sleeping bag. The day before they had walked miles and forded the river at the bend when it was dark. Miss World put on her bifocals and looked in front.

The world was quiet and the light rose steadily from behind the dark wall of tthe mountains. The light intensified as it climbed higher and higher. Suddenly, the mountain on her right developed a long, thin crack. It was as though the mountain had split open just there and sunlight flowed into the gap.

Miss World struggled out of her sleeping bag and rushed to awaken mountains. The light intensified as it climbed higher and higher. Suddenly, the mountain on her right developed a long, thin crack. It was as though the mountain had split open just there and sunlight flowed into the gap.

'What?' said the immortal one, yawning. Miss World pointed. 'Ah...' he whispered softly, sitting up. '...where the mountain cracks at dawn.'

They watched, trying to figure out a path that would lead them there. A few minutes later, the sun popped up over the mountain top and filled the sky. The crack of light disappeared instantly. And the birds woke up the hillside with the morning news which ran thus:

'Green and juicy worms are in the shrubs today. Soft and squashy ones are below the rocks. But the best ones according to Boss, are under the guy still in his sleeping bag. Get him to move...'

A bit too much these birds. 'Let's go...' Nachiketas said, shaking himself out of the sleeping bag. But Miss World was already walking far ahead.

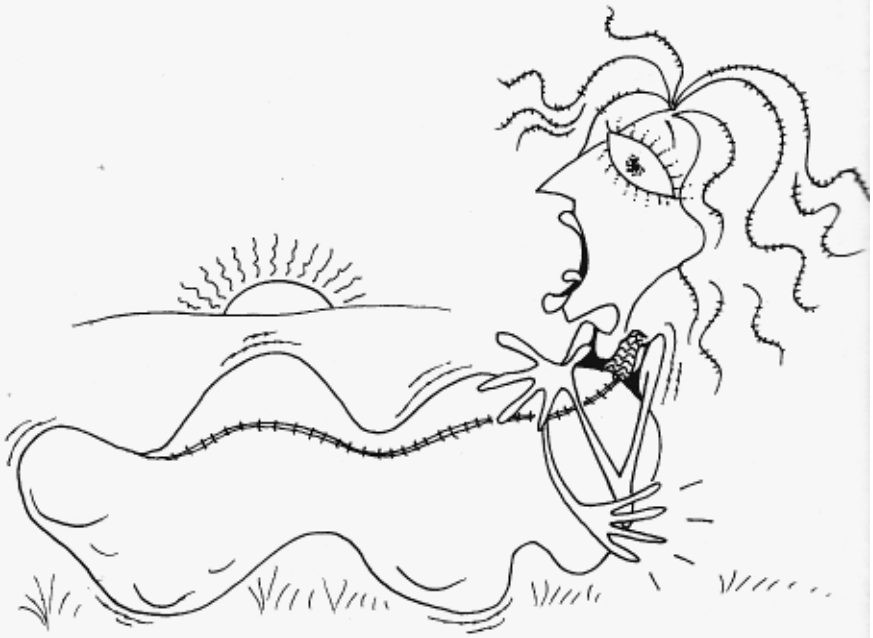
Back in Lakhan's tea shop in the village, one score miles on the other side of the river, Krishna Baul regaled the two strangers who had been asking questions the night before. Even though they were not interested, he told them about the Supreme Being, about the gods and about Aditi.

'Aditi?' their ears perked up, 'You mean Miss World?'

'Yes...' Krishna Baul nodded, 'Miss World!' and roared with laughter. 'Aditi is the mother of the world, Hari! She is the Unity, the Infinite Consciousness and the limitless Light from which her sons, the gods are formed...'

Oh, oh... Wrong number.

The two agents let him rant and slowly closed their eyes and fell asleep.



That morning as Lakhan made them tea, Krishna Baul announced, 'Okay friends, now I am off to see my friend Nachiketas.'

The two men choked over their tea.

'C-can we come with you sir?'

'Whoever will sing the name of the Mother can walk with me Hari.'

'Er... yes of course...' said the two, their hearts sinking below their boots. 'But this Nachiketas, you know him personally?'

'Well what do you think?'

'Will you introduce us to him?'

'Personally?' he grinned slyly.

'Er.. yesss'...

Krishna Baul closed his eyes. 'Tell you what...' he said, 'if you can spot him, I will.' They agreed. They had good identity photos of the guy taken during that scandalous interview, in front of Nachiketas' newstand in Calcutta.

'Is he alone or with someone?'

'He is with a woman,' came the smooth reply.

Adrenalin rushed through their brains and went headlong into celebration. Hands dived into pockets and out came photographs of the fabulous Aditi Singh, Miss World. 'Does she look like this?' they asked eagerly. Recalling his last impression of bifocals, pigtails and braces, Krishna Baul chortled with delight, 'Oh, no..no..no! Not at all...' It was terribly disappointing. But they decided to check it out anyway.

Before leaving, one of them disappeared to radio a message to headquarters.

'Agents Double and Trouble reporting. We've picked up Nachiketas' track. There is a woman with him but doesn't seem to correspond. We're on our way to check it out.' 'Roger. Good work Double-Trouble. Keep us informed.'

The cold wind whipped mercilessly through the high pass. It whistled and howled, shrieking and shuddering in the narrow passage as Aditi walked. It was still a very long way. Finally, the wind went full swing into thump and wallop. Chop, zibbet and yowl. Miss World walked steadily, pigtails flying valiantly in the violent wind. Nachiketas was still far behind. The sky now began to orchestrate itself to a cresendo as the wind snarled and thundered through the tempestuous pass. A large rock wrenched out of the mountain wall and came crashing down, a tiny inch away from her feet. Very, very close shave.

Miss World stood absolutely still. No way was she going to take any more of this. In that instant she felt a space open inside her...like a huge acre of warm light. It expanded, magnified, it had amplitude. It was ready for any combat. Inside that light she knew then, that even the great mountains would crumble like

biscuits. Miss World stood still as the wind worked itself upto a stupendous fury and pounded out at her at fantastic speed.

'Okay...enough,' she said quietly. 'Shut up.'

It was a long moment, and the powers seemed to be uncertain. Then slowly, the wind looped off with a sigh and began to unwind. 'That's better,' said Miss World, and walked on, pleasantly surprised to find a sunny sky at the end of the pass.

Far behind, Nachiketas watched Aditi standing at the end of the pass. She surveyed the valley in front as though she had chanced upon Shangri-La. There were none of the usual reactions of excitement though. Aditi stood poised after that deadly storm, intensely calm. When he got to the other end, she turned to him.

'Welcome to Discovery Channel Nachiketas.' Complete with a dithyrambic grin.

'Right. So what did you discover' ?

'The fire of Nachiketas'

'Oh...was it any use?' he asked carelessly.

'Well....it thrust away the meshes of the snare of Death.' she said with equal nonchalance. They shook hands solemnly. Nachiketas dug his hands into his pocket and produced a flower. He held it up to the sky as he spoke, and then he handed it to her with a flourish.

'Supreme Aditi, Mother of the gods, is born through the *prana* of the universe! This whole universe in motion moves in that *prana* and from that *prana* everything originates! A mighty terror he can be...like a thunder bolt uplifted! But those who know him, are immortal...'

Aditi accepted the flower with a gentle bow.

'Yama told you all that didn't he?'

'Yes indeed. Death is the passage one must confront before one can understand the secret of the gods.'

'Now wait a minute Nachiketas, in that note I gave the Secretary General, it said: "One unmoving that is swifter than Mind, THAT the gods reach not!" So, what or who is That One?'

'I can give you the theory right away, but for the real stuff you have to ask the *rishis*.'

'Why?'

'Well, as you have already seen so far on our discovery channel, this learning is not simply a matter of instruction. It is a way of developing a precise intuition of knowledge. The Saptarishis had this knowledge as well as the method.'

'Only *seven rishis*? I thought there were more.'

'No, Saptarishi was a way of referring to the seers of the *Rig Veda*. The list of names differ in the ancient texts, but some remain constant. Like, Atri and Angiras, Vashistha and Vishwamitra, Bhrigu and Bharadwaja and Gautama.'

'What, no women!?' Miss World was shocked.

'Easy, lady. Each of these names also represent a clan of *rishis*, among whom there were women as well. For instance, Vishvawara, who belonged to the house of Atris. Or Apala among the Bhrigus.'

'Oh, *ca va alors*. Lets go then.'

Unfortunately all these things went unreported in the news. The world was once more busy with cricket. Silly things happened at mid-on and at mid-off, which was enough to keep earthlings enthralled. It gave the Management a bit of time to straighten out a few things.

Pressure was put on the reporter from the *Indian Times* who had done the 'so called' interview with God. He was asked to publicly deny the story and backtrack. But the young fellow was intransigent. He refused. He stood his ground and would not budge.

There was a lot of heavy weather. Hunched up in his *barsati*, our young man considered his un-watered flowerpot gloomily. It was not fair. Just not cricket. If there was one thing that he knew for certain, it was that he *had* met God. Everyone was now questioning one petty detail. It was the dress code thing. Although he had been wearing a *lungi* for reasons of civilisation, it was clear that clothes were not God's way of declaring identity. There was definitely that omnipresent, omnipotent stuff around - the kind of stuff that usually occurs when one encounters God. After that, words fail a mortal. So, of course, our young reporter could not elaborate further.

That is when God decided to interfere a bit.

The phone rang. It was the Secretary General from his undisclosed vacation hideout. 'There's a ticket for you at the airline office. If you can come by for the weekend we can talk a few things over. I wanted to cross-check some details of your meeting with God. Because I er.. just er... met Her half an hour ago you see...So, how about it young man? It is a lovely place here by the sea...?'

'A-Absolutely Ravioli!' spluttered our young reporter. 'I mean *Yes*! Absolutely. I'll be right over Sir.' He put down the phone and did a mad little ziganka. A free five-star interview had been handed to him on a platter. Just -like -that.

'I saw Him, but he met Her...?' he stopped abruptly, confused. 'Is God the same guy?'

At the Management Headquarters, the Special Intelligence Committee (SIC) was listening to the latest report from agents Double-Trouble with grave concern. They were running around the mountains with a minstrel. This eccentric esoteric was teaching them methods of non-violent attack. And so, they were running around with the chap, singing the name of the divine mother all over the hillside. In order to find Nachiketas and a mysterious pass. It was completely retarded.

'Oh dear, they've had it.'

'Had what?'

'A relapsed synapse. Don't you hear, they are reporting rubbish. Their brains

and all their briefing have been blown to bits by that demented idiot who is taking them around on a dance.'

'Doesn't this character resemble the description of the man that the Guru once gave us?' someone pointed out. The committee groaned. The plot had thickened. In fact, that very morning they had received a surprise email which said 'Have a Good Day!' It was signed—the Guru.

The Committee retreated into a state of morose coma and sulked severely for fifteen minutes. Until…

'All is not lost!' said one, bringing his fist down on the table with a bang. 'We must send a search helicopter immediately to recover Double-Trouble *and* that minstrel. That's the fellow who has the whole cat in his bag, gentlemen.'

'So be it,' it was agreed.

They were sitting on a rocky edge outside a cave. The ancient river descended from the gods and tumbled past them rashly. The man with the white beard had eyes as bright and as mythic as the sky. His name was Vyasa. As he spoke with Aditi and Nachiketas, he picked up the faint grinding drone of a search helicopter, still quite far away.

'They won't find your friends today,' he smiled, indicating the helicopter that was looking for Double-Trouble. 'Your friends have just entered the pass but the little *vimana* will never find it. Because that pass belongs to a different reality.'

Miss World's eyebrows shot up like blackbirds.

'More has to happen before they can be found,'continued Vyasa—the knower of all stories in all the three worlds—Here, There and Everywhere. Also the compiler of the *Vedas*. Vyasa was, in fact, the finest consultant they could have stumbled across to guide them through the labyrinths of knowledge.

'Know what this is, child?' he asked Aditi.

'A computer chip,' she said, without batting an eyelid.

'Good,' said the Brahmarishi. 'But even your Mr Gates cannot imagine what this thing can do. Now I have programmed your tour into the ancient and present worlds in this thing. It's not always in chronological order though; nevertheless, it will help you get a better vantage point of your future. Every detail has been given—where to go, how to get there, what to see, who to meet. I looked up a few do-it-yourself travel guides,'he added impishly. 'Only one thing, follow the order of the instructions and do not try to jump ahead however easy it may sometimes seem.'

'But how does this work, Brahmarishi?'

'Oh yes, I forgot. Hold the chip to your ear and wait ten seconds. After that you will hear a hum inside your head. Pay attention because all the instructions are inside that hum. Clear?'

'A magical mystery tour…' Aditi murmured in awe.

'Yes,' laughed Vyasa. 'Only, don't you go and lucy up in the sky. It is very important to always keep the ground.'

'That's tough Vyasa, how?'

'You know already child but listen.' He turned to Nachiketas.

'Nachiketas, what is the stable ground?'

'The Fire.'

'Nachiketas, how does Fire move?'

'One-pointed, with intent.'

'From where does it proceed?'

'From the Will.'

'What does it see?'

'It sees the goal and makes it increase.'

'What is that goal?'

'The Self.'

'Of what is the Self composed?'

'Come on Vyasa, we'll give the whole thing away to Aditi even before we start.'

'No, hold on.' interrupted Miss World. 'What does all this have to do with God's speed?'

'That's what this chip is programmed to show you. Have a go. In case there is ever a problem, just dip it in the river and shake it well, then listen to it again.'

Now *that* would be very difficult for Bill Gates to imagine…

Vyasa gave her the chip

After a brief moment of hesitation, Aditi held it up to her ear.

High above, the helicopter droned helplessly, unable to see a thing through the clouds, even as the the reporter from the *Indian Times* sold his latest story to the *Planet News, Good Morning World* and *The Extra Salt Tribune*.

Krishna Baul was singing his way lustily along the pass, while Double-Trouble ran about desperately for cover. The wind raged and the rocks crashed randomly on purpose.

The chip had begun to hum inside Miss World's head. She listened. 'Vishvawara…10 north-east…20 minutes from the wild-rose bush behind the cave...

Ask for the House of Atri but don't expect buildings… .Keep Left.'

It was time to move.

To continue: Episode 5. Opening Secrets

Anu Majumdar is a dancer-choreographer, poet and writer. She has recently published a novel, *Parallel Journeys*. She lives in Auroville.

Illustrations: **Rustam Vania**

CURLY'S NOTES

Young peppy Swapna Sundaram is a lighting designer who lives and works in Los Angeles. Here are some 'Swapnesian' views on the cosmos.

THE CITY OF (HELLS) ANGELS?

I guess it didn't really hit me until the time Vikram and I stopped at the gas station outside San Jose. I had just finished filling our car up in preparation for the 400 mile journey back to Los Angeles from Northern California, where we had driven up for a few days of vacation. The station attendant's curiosity-filled eyes darted back and forth as I was paying him, and finally lit on the car's license plates. 'Los Angeles?' he asked, 'Is that where you guys are from?' 'Yup,' I smiled at him, 'We drove up here to visit relatives.' 'And you want to go back?' he sounded incredulous. 'What do you mean?' This time I was the one sounding curious. 'Well, you know, what with all the night-time curfew and all … and I'm sure that y'all keep guns in each drawer …' he petered off. 'Guns? We don't keep any guns! And where did this story about a curfew originate from?' I demanded. Pushed into a corner, he became belligerent, 'Hey, I watch TV, you know. And it always seems like L.A. has all the gangs and stuff and sirens in the news. And my friend, he lives in L.A., he says that he carries a gun. And he never leaves the house after eight in the night!' Understanding dawned, but I was determined to set things straight with a person who seemed to me a perfect example of the village idiot—'Oh, your friend most probably lives in downtown L.A. That's where the gangs you see on TV are. But, they're really cleaning up that area. And anyway, that's just a small part of L.A. Where I live, it's pretty much safe, just like here in San Jose. And I'm positive that San Jose also has "bad" areas and sleazy people!' 'Yeah, whatever,' he had clearly got his mind made up, 'Well, goodbye. Jeez, and you guys ain't even carrying a gun!'

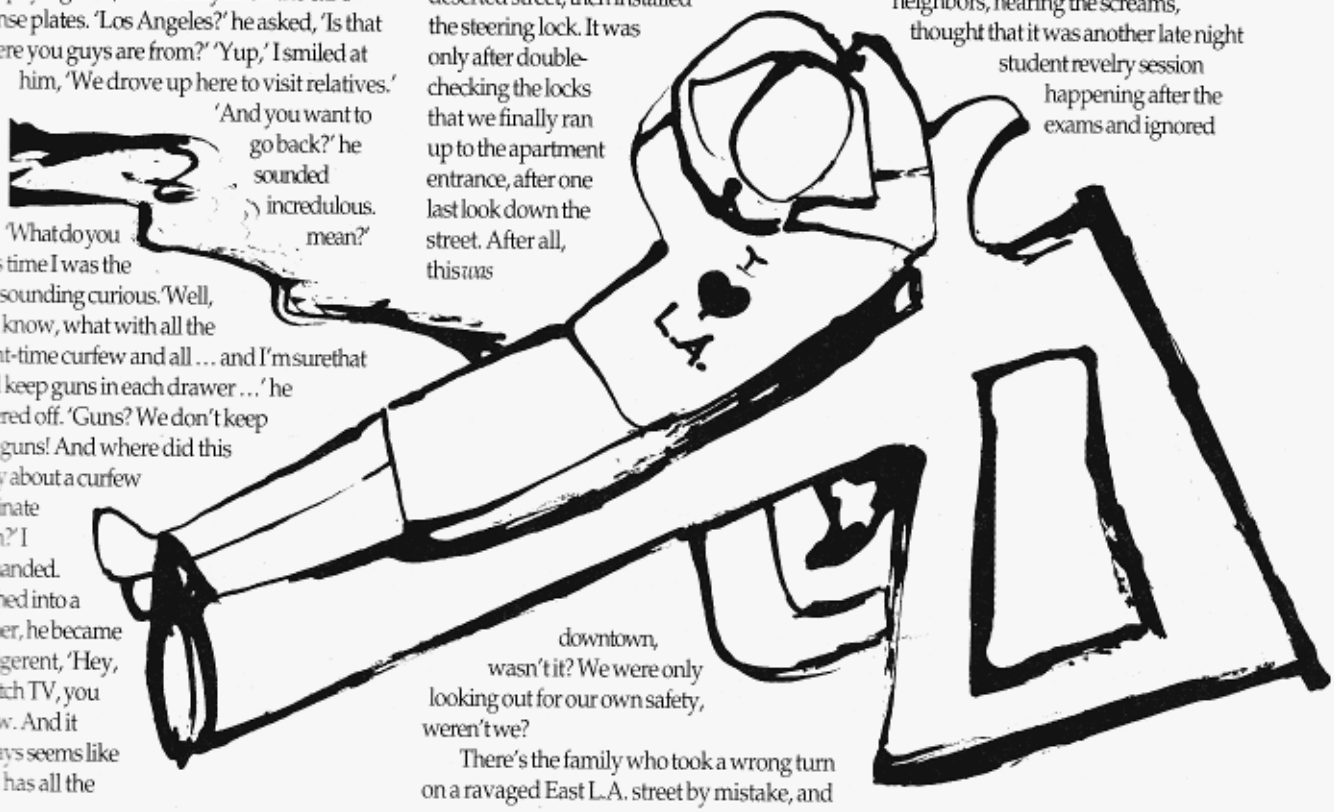
And that's the story of Los Angeles from everybody else's point of view. Not to say that there haven't been times when I haven't felt like the guy at the gas station…

There's the time recently when Vikram and I went to downtown L.A. for a party at a colleague's apartment. Seven o' clock, he said. We left our house at 5.30 p.m., in order that we could reach the place well before dark. Although he had assured me that it was a nice, safe student-filled neighborhood close to USC (University of Southern California), *we* sure weren't taking any chances, no sirree. After parking the car under the nearest lit street pole, we quickly glanced up and down the deserted street, then installed the steering lock. It was only after double-checking the locks that we finally ran up to the apartment entrance, after one last look down the street. After all, this *was* downtown, wasn't it? We were only looking out for our own safety, weren't we?

There's the family who took a wrong turn on a ravaged East L.A. street by mistake, and ended up within the fiercely guarded, strongly delineated boundaries of a local youth gang. The father was wounded as he was calling up the cops from the cellphone. The little four-year-old girl was killed by a hail of gunshots as she was running away from the car.

There's the day when I was still in architecture school at UCLA, and stopped walking home to my apartment a few streets away from campus after 10 p.m. Until that day, I had always felt that the streets around my campus were the safest places to be even well after midnight. And then a friend of mine mentioned that his classmate had gotten mugged in an alleyway at night while walking home alone. It was the campus shuttle for me after that…

And who could forget those three girls, all students, who lived a stone's throw away from my apartment building near UCLA? Entering their apartment late at night after a party, they were accosted by a male youth who had broken in and was hiding in the closet. As he chased them with a club, the girls ran and knocked on neighbors' windows in desperation, screaming for help. But most of the neighbors, hearing the screams, thought that it was another late night student revelry session happening after the exams and ignored



the commotion. By the time the cops got to the scene, the girls were badly wounded, the apartment in shambles and robbed, while the burglar had escaped. Later, we heard rumours that one of the girls was Indian, a close friend of one of my roommates, but we never really did verify that.

There's the night when my mother and I were in my little car in the right lane, waiting to take our right turn, and another car to the left of us suddenly without any warning swerved in front of us, and zipped into the driveway to our right without any indicator or a by-your-leave. I narrowly avoided colliding into the jerk, and I automatically honked. I can never forget the abuses he hurled at us as we took our turn. I can also never forget how he followed us after that for nearly two miles, continually honking and abusing. I was never so scared as I sped down the road that night, thinking that any time he would whip out a gun and shoot at us.

Yeah, L.A. has street gangs, and road anger, and earthquakes, and violence, and sports heroes who murder their wives and get away with it. Yeah, we're the butt of jokes in countless films. Remember Steve Martin in *L.A. Story* showing a tourist friend around the film-star mansions of Beverly Hills and saying, 'You know, some of these houses are over *thirty years old*!'? Remember Woody Allen in *Annie Hall* telling a friend in New York that he would never move to L.A. because 'the only cultural advantage is that you can make a right turn on a red light'?

But the point is, though the aforementioned violent incidents exist in this the largest city in the United States, they are isolated. They are little ripples in little pockets, and they don't make up the whole story. I know, because I haven't faced a street gang in any of the neighbourhoods where I have lived for as long as I have lived here. There hasn't been a major earthquake since I've been here. And for every sports hero who goes back to playing golf, there's a cop who gets a medal of courage and a rapist who gets sent to the chair.

I know, because finally the attention is shifting from what's going wrong with this city, to what this city can be proud of. Like the new Getty Center designed by Richard Meier, which cost billions to envision, finance, design and build, but which now stands like a beacon of culture and art and beauty on the hilltop over Los Angeles, attracting visitors from the same places which mocked us before. And the new California Science Center, which was inaugurated by Vice President Al Gore recently. And in a dubious yet proud sort of way, the fact that road anger has decreased sharply in Los Angeles in recent years, but increased proportionately in Seattle, which up till now was known only for its mountains and rainy weather and the Microsoft headquarters building. And again dubiously, to the fact that the attention is shifting from the sleazy doings of our film and entertainment stars to the sleazy sexploits of the top-ranked man in Washington.

I guess that's why, when somebody points out something wrong about my city that he or she has heard about but not experienced, I am quick to spring to its defence. And also, maybe that's why I still live here and plan to go on living here, and not in Seattle or Washington or any other supposedly 'non-violent' place. Hell, they have their problems too, I've found out. And they sure as hell don't have 330 days of sunny weather and beaches and suntan…

THE TEAM AT THE EYE

Aasha Deodhar has been associated with SPIC MACAY since many years. She teaches Sanskrit and is a part of a small group that studies the Bhagavadgita. She has also taught French. Aashaji is Subscription In-charge at THE EYE.

Benu Joshi is a graduate from the National Institute of Design is working as a design consultant.

Gautam Haridas, 24 volunteers at THE EYE and writes poetry.

Madhusudan Sarkar is office assistant at THE EYE.

M. Deepak is a post graduate in economics and has worked with many NGOs. He handles media for INDIA'S QUEST.

Nikhil Mathur is a commerce graduate. Nikhil is Project Co-ordinator, INDIA'S QUEST.

Rukmini Sekhar has had a long association with SPIC MACAY and other NGOs. She started THE EYE in 1992 and has been its Editor since.

Sunil Pathak is a commerce graduate. He handles accounts.

Urmi Goswami is a post graduate in history, she has worked in editorial departments os various publishing houses. She is Associate Editor, THE EYE.

Uttara Begde is a English Literature graduate. She has a management degree from Delhi. She looks after the Marketing and Publicity of the Creative Media Cell of which THE EYE is a part.

It is said that an ounce of sense contained in the *Panchantantra* is better than a ton of scholarship. Most of us are familiar with it from our childhood as 'once-upon-a-time' stories and have read them in abridged forms or in comics. Rarely have we encountered a literal translation in verse form. Indeed, these wise verses, often epigrammatic in style, go to make the real character of the *Panchatantra*. The stories are charming when regarded as pure narrative, but it is the beauty, wisdom and wit of the verses which lift the *Panchatantra* above the best story books.

The *Panchatantra* is a *niti shastra* or textbook of *niti*. The word *niti* roughly means like 'wise conduct of life'. It is witty, mischievous and profoundly sane. The word, *Panchatantra* means, the *Five Books*, the *Pentateuch*. Each of the five books are independent, consisting of a framing story with numerous, inserted stories, told by one or another of the characters of the main narrative. The device of the framing story is familiar in oriental works, as in the Arabian Nights. The large majority of the actors are animals, who have, of course, a fairly constant character. Thus, the lion is strong, but dull of wit, the jackal crafty, the heron stupid, the cat a hypocrite. The animal actors present far more vividly and shrewdly undeceived and free of all sentimentality, a view, that piercing the humbug of every false ideal, reveals with incomparable wit the sources of lasting joy. And this is how it happened ...

One Vishnusharman shrewdly gleaning
All wordly wisdom's inner meaning.
In these five books the charm compresses
Of all such books the world possesses.

In the southern country is a city called Maiden's Delight. There lived a king named Immortal Power. He was familiar with all the works dealing with the wise conduct of life. His feet were made dazzling by the tangle of rays of light from jewels in the diadems of mighty kings who knelt before him. He had reached the far shore of all the arts that embellish life. This king had three sons. Their names were Rich-Power, Fierce-Power and Endless-Power and they were supreme blockheads.

Now when the king perceived that they were hostile to education, he summoned his counsellors and said, 'Gentlemen, it is known to you that these sons of mine, being hostile to education, are lacking in discernment. So when I behold them, my kingdom brings me no happiness, though all external thorns are drawn. For there is wisdom in the proverb:

Of sons unborn, or dead, or fools,
Unborn or dead will do:
They cause a little grief, no doubt;
But fools, a long life through.

and again:

To what good purpose can a cow
That brings no calf nor milk be bent?
Or why beget a son who proves
A dunce and disobedient?

Some means must therefore be devised to awaken their intelligence.'

And they, one after another, replied, 'O King, first one learns grammar, in twelve years. If this subject has somehow been mastered, then one masters the books on religion and practical life. then the intelligence awakens.'

But one of their number, a counsellor named Keen said; 'O King, the duration of life is limited, and the verbal sciences require much time for mastery. Therefore let some king of epitome be devised to wake their intelligence. There is a proverb that says:

Since verbal sciences
have no final end,
Since life is short, and
obstacles impend,
Let central facts be picked and
firmly fixed
As swans extract the milk
with water mixed.

'Now, there is a Brahmin here named Vishnusharman, with a reputation for competence in numerous sciences. Entrust the princes to him. He will certainly make them intelligent in a twinkling.'

When the king had listened to this, he summoned Vishnusharman and said, 'Holy sir, as a favour to me you must make these princes incomparable masters of the art of practical life. In return, I will bestow upon you a hundred land grants.'

And Vishnusharman made this answer to the king, 'O King, listen. Here is the plain truth. I am not the man to sell good learning for a hundred land grants. But if I do not, in six months' time, make the boys acquainted with the art of intelligent living, I will give up my own name. Let us cut the matter short. Listen to my lion roar. My boasting arises from no greed for cash. Besides, I have no use for money; I am eighty years old, and all the objects of sensual desire have lost their charm. But in order that your request may be granted, I will show a sporting spirit with reference to artistic matters. Make a note of the date. If I fail to render your sons, in six months' time, incomparable masters of the art of intelligent living, then His Majesty is at liberty to show me His Majestic bare bottom.'

When the king, surrounded by his counsellors, had listened to the Brahmin's highly unconventional promise, he was dumbstruck. He entrusted the princes to him, and experienced supreme content.

Meanwhile, Vishnusharman took the boys, went home, and made them learn by heart, five books which he composed and called

- The Loss of Friends
- The Winning of Friends
- Crows and Owls
- Loss of Gains
- Ill-considered Action.

These the princes learned, and in six months' time they answered the prescription. Since that day this work on the art of intelligent living, called the *Panchatantra*, or the *Five Books*, has travelled the world, aiming at awakening

The Story of the Last Three Episodes

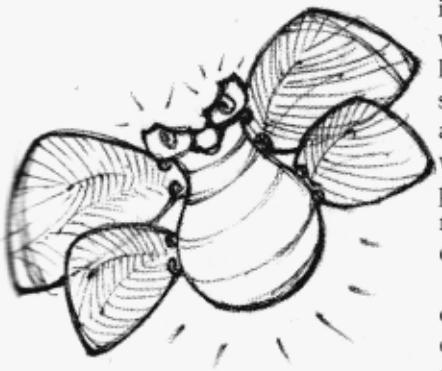
Rusty the lion and Lively the bull wounded each other severely in a fight caused by the stupidity of Victor the jackal. Whereupon Cheek admonished Victor and related a story.

A naked monk arrived in the Koshala country and proceeded to charm the entire populace, the king included, with his knowledge of certain peculiar astronomical movements. Soon he declared that he daily ascended to heaven in a divine body leaving the other, lifeless one behind in his cell. The besotted king began neglecting his affairs. At this time Counsellor Strong returned after quelling some rebels in the forest. Upon learning of the situation, and witnessing the monk entering his cell, he asked the king to burn the cell so that the great monk might stand revealed in his resplendent divine body. In which connection he related the following story:

A childless Brahmin couple conceived a child as a result of a sacrifice. But the son born to them was a snake. Paying no heed, they brought him up with love and care, and one day the Brahmin travelled to a foreign land in search of a wife for his snake-son. He found a girl of surpassing beauty in the house of one of his kinsmen and brought her back. She was advised against fulfilling the contract. But the girl recited the story of the poor Blossom, Indra's parrot, who died at the sight of Death, even as it was fated. So saying, she married the snake and began to attend on him daily. And one day the snake revealed himself to be a godlike handsome human.... The Brahmin burnt the snake body and proudly revealed his son to the world.

Now, the counsellor, having told his story, set fire to the cell. Thus, said Cheek, were the ways of true counsellors. Victor, he said, had inherited his incompetence from his father and did not possess dignity. Good advice was wasted on him. How was that? asked Victor. And Cheek told the story of...

The Unteachable Monkey



In a part of a forest was a troop of monkeys who found a firefly one winter evening when they were dreadfully depressed. On examining the insect, they believed it to be fire, so lifted it with care, covered it with dry grass and leaves, thrust forward their arms, sides, stomachs, and chests, scratched themselves, and enjoyed imagining that they were warm. One of the arboreal creatures in particular, being especially chilly, blew repeatedly and with concentrated attention on the firefly.

Thereupon, a bird named Needle-Face, driven by hostile fate to her own destruction, flew down from her tree and said to the monkey: 'My dear sir, do not put yourself to unnecessary trouble. This is not fire. This is a firefly'. He, however, did not heed her warning but blew again, nor did he stop when she tried more than once to check him. To cut a long story short, when she vexed him by coming close and shouting in his ear, he seized her and dashed her on a rock, crushing face, eyes, head and neck so that she died.

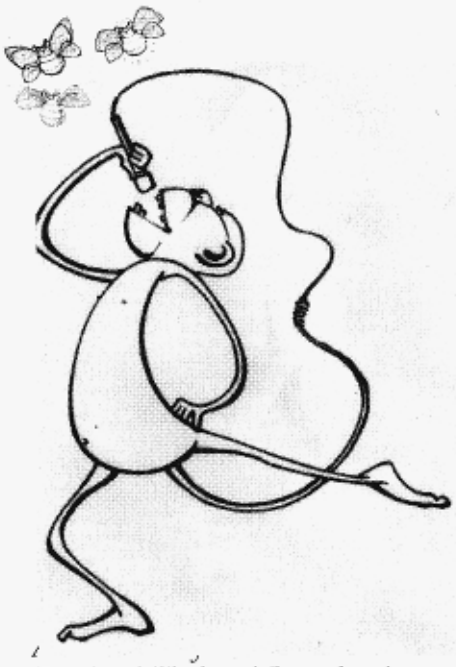
'And that is why I say:

No knife prevails against a stone;....

and the rest of it. For, after all,

Educating minds unfit
Cannot rescue sluggish wit,
Just as house-lamps wasted are,
Set within a covered jar.

'Plainly, you are what is known as "worse-born". The technical explanation runs:
Sons of four divergent kinds



'Born' and 'like-born,' 'better-born':
Lastly, 'worse-born' has their scorn.

'Born' the mother's image gives:
'Like-born' like the father lives;
'Better-born' more nobly acts;
'Worse-born' morally subtracts.

'Ah, there is wisdom in the saying:

By whom far-piercing wisdom or
Great wealth or power is won
To lift the family, in him
A mother has a son.

Again:

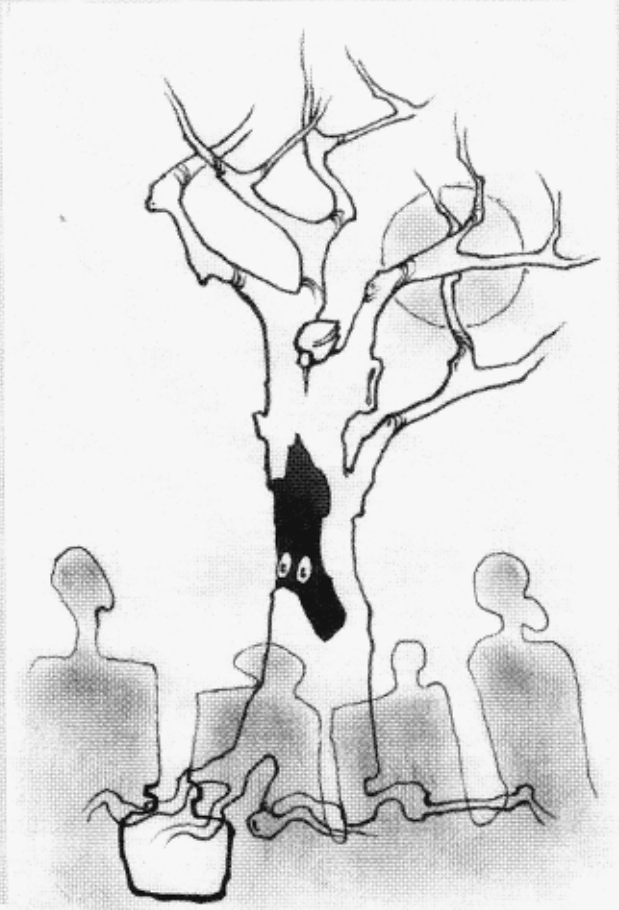
A merely striking beauty
Is not so hard to find;
A rarer gem is wisdom,
Far-reaching power of mind.

'Yes, there is sense in the story:

Right-Mind was one, and Wrong-
Mind two;
I know the tale by heart:
The son in smoke made father choke
By being supersmart.'

'How was that?' asked Victor. And Cheek told the story of…

Right-mind & Wrong-Mind



In a certain city lived two friends, sons of merchants, and their names were Right-Mind and Wrong-Mind. These two travelled to another country far away in order to earn money. There the one named Right-Mind, as a consequence of favouring fortune, found a pot containing a thousand dinars, which had been hidden long before by a holy man. He debated the matter with Wrong-Mind, and they decided to go home, since their object was attained. So they returned together.

When they drew near their native city, Right-Mind said: 'My good friend, a half of this falls to your share. Pray take it, so that, now that we are at home, we may cut a brilliant figure before our friends and those less friendly.'

But Wrong-Mind, with a sneaking thought of his own advantage, said to the other: 'My good friend, so long as we two hold this treasure in common, so long will our virtuous friendship suffer no interruption. Let us each take a hundred dinars, and go to our homes after concealing the remainder. The decrease or increase of this treasure will serve as a test of our virtue.'

Now Right-Mind, in the nobility of his nature, did not comprehend the hidden duplicity of his friend, and agreed to the proposal. Each then took a certain sum of money. They carefully hid the residue in the ground, and made their entrance into the city.

Before long, Wrong-Mind exhausted his preliminary portion because he practiced the vice of unwise expenditure and because his predetermined fate offered vulnerable points. He therefore made a second division with Right-Mind, each taking a second hundred. Within a year, this, too, had slipped in the same way through Wrong-Mind's fingers. As a result, his thoughts took this form:'Suppose I divide another two hundred with him, then what is the good of the remainder, a paltry four hundred, even if I steal it? I think I prefer to steal a round six hundred.' After this meditation, he went alone, removed the

treasure, and levelled the ground.

A mere month later, he took the initiative, going to Right-Mind and saying: 'My good friend, let us divide the rest of the money equally.' So he and Right-Mind visited the spot and began to dig. When the excavation failed to reveal any treasure, that impudent Wrong-Mind first of all smote his own head with the empty pot, then shouted: 'What became of that good lucre? Surely, Right-Mind, you must have stolen it. Give me my half. If you don't, I will bring you into court.'

'Be silent, villain!' said the other. 'My name is Right-Mind. Such thefts are not in my line. You know the verse:

A man right-minded sees but trash,
Mere clods of earth, in others' cash;
A mother in his neighbour's wife,
In all that lives, his own dear life.'

So together they carried their dispute to court and related the theft of the money. And when the magistrates learned the facts, they decreed an ordeal for each. But Wrong-Mind said: 'Come! This judgment is not proper. For the legal dictum runs:

Best evidence is written word;
Next, witnesses who saw and heard;
Then only let ordeals prevail
When witnesses completely fail.

In the present case, I have a witness, the goddess of the wood. She will reveal to you which one of us is guilty, which not guilty. And they replied: 'You are quite right, sir. For there is a further saying:

To meanest witnesses, ordeals
Should never be preferred;
Of course much less, if you possess
A forest goddess' word.

Now we also feel a great interest in the case. You two must accompany us tomorrow morning to that part of the forest.' With this they accepted bail from each and sent them home.

Then Wrong-Mind went home and asked his father's help. 'Father dear,' said he, 'the dinars are in my hand. They only require one little word from you. This very night I am going to hide you out of sight in a hole in the mimosa tree that grows near the spot where I dug out the treasure before. In the morning you must be my witness in the presence of the magistrates.'

'Oh, my son,' said the father, 'we are both lost. This is no kind of a scheme. There is wisdom in the old story:

The good and bad of given schemes
Wise thought must first reveal:
The stupid heron saw his chicks
Provide a mongoose meal.'

'How was that?' asked Wrong-Mind. And his father told the story of

A REMEDY WORSE THAN THE DISEASE

(To be continued...)

In 1924, **Arthur W.Ryder**, the well known American Oriental Scholar translated the Panchatantra from Sanskrit to English. It is one of the best of existing translations in any foreign language. The text translated here dates back from the year 1199AD. We are happy to serialise and present the Panchatantra, interspersing verse and prose as translated by Ryder and published by Jaico.

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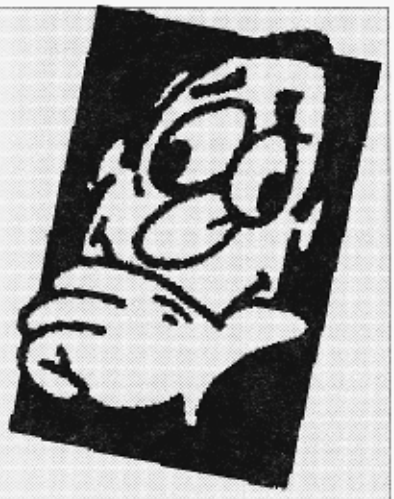


10° SQUINT

ASHISH KHOKAR

Living in the capital city has its own rewards. Like being exposed to a lot of culture, if you can call it that. All sorts abound here: the dedicated, the dilettante and the Delhite. The dedicated pursue their own greatness with devotion. They run the cultural empire, make their own 'original' work, and believe that without them the scene would be so-o much dead-er. The dilettante perceives culture as an extension of agriculture. For them, both sprout from mother earth and are equally divisible and biodegradable. The Delhite cannot be defined for if this specimen could be, it would not be so.

Recently, at a New Age seminar (where energy radiates from palms, foreheads and other places) a painted beauty, eyes radiating cosmic rays, walks up to me and says, 'So who are you'? I fumble for the humble statement, but before I could say anything she bleats, 'I am a hologram!' I pause for an instant and say, 'In which case I am a mirage'. She vibrates with new age compassion and proceeds to place her hands on my humbly bent head. 'Reiki', she whispered, 'the only way to heal'. She transmits some cosmic energy, but being a mere mortal caught in the ugly web of urban karma, all it does is leave me cold.

In fact, the entire seminar left me frozen. There was a doctor who criticised the British medical system which wiped out our traditional methods and yet continues to practice it. There was a 'past-life therapist' who looked like she never left her previous body. Then there was a Vaastu specialist who looked more like a neighbourhood *halwai*. And then there was someone else who looked like a saucer from the tea house of the august moon.

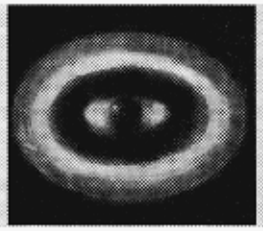
Let me tell my readers an interesting story—real life, I promise you! L. Subramaniam, the acclaimed violinist had invited Lord Yehudi Menuhin, a violin legend of the world, to visit India and receive the Lakshminarayanan Global Music Award. He was to conduct an orchestra but there was a simple problem—the organisers forgot to book seats for a sixty piece orchestra in good time! (What to do, we are like that only). So here was Yehudi Menuhin with no orchestra to conduct! And to make matters worse, when someone called the Vice President's office to fix Lord Menuhin's courtesy visit to him, the bloke at the VP's office asked, 'Menon who?' In a flash, the famous Russian Jew got converted into a fish-eating, curly-haired Keralite. 'He is a famous violinist,' replied the man. 'You know - v-i-o-l-i-n?' He spelt it out carefully. At which point the bloke at the VP's office said, 'What's that?'

By the way, just a passing point—the Vice President of India is also the Chairman of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, a wing of the External Affairs Ministry which oversees cultural exchange programmes. But though he is an honourable man, his secretariat could perhaps be given a beginner's course on Musical Instruments of India. The advanced course could then deal with the number of strings and frets, rare instruments etc. Now you realise why Delhi is so cultured.

And here's another horror story. Jean Pierre Rampal, the world-famous flautist came for a concert. He came in a wheel chair but there was no one to receive him. He was left in the arrival hall by the attendant saying he was fetching more passengers! So much for our famous *athithi satkar* which left him stranded at the mercy of callous airport staff for whom the flute looked closest to the *lathi* with which they shooed off the thronging herds gathered to send off their loved one from Ludhiana to London.

Having been subjected to the cultural panorama for thirty-three years now, I think I have had more than my fill. It makes little sense in this senseless game. Having seen a wide variety of operators, I feel it is time to go far from the madding crowd. *Chennai Chalo*! is the slogan because the only thing I wish to do now is serve my parents in their old age. I told Ruku baby, the editor of this silly magazine no one reads, that I would be stopping my column henceforth but she says, let the poison, oops, prose flow. From Adyar or Periyar. So, you gullible, foolish folks you have to continue suffering me. Ha, ha!

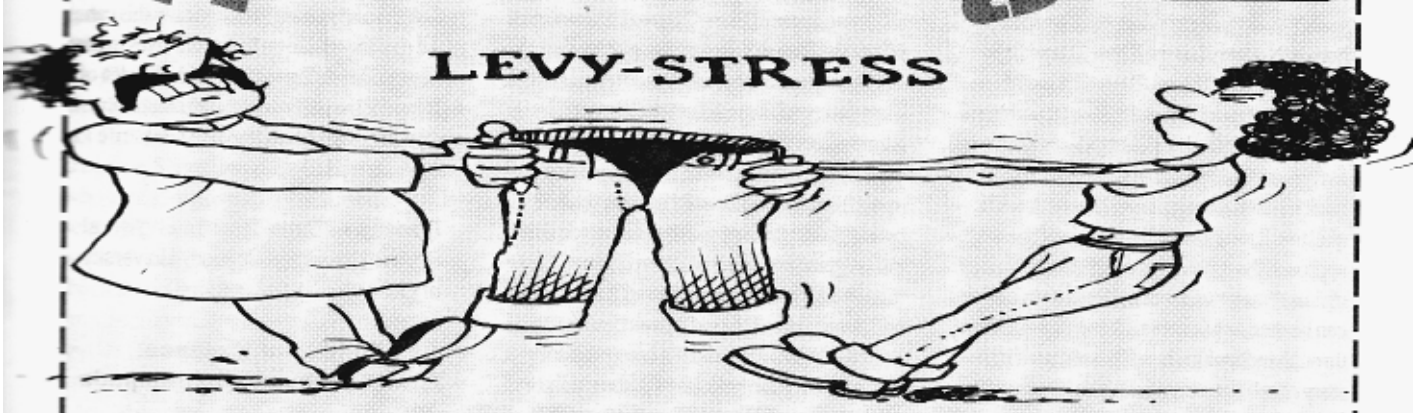
Ashish Khokar, critic, writer, humorist, photographer who has served several silly cultural organisations has had enough of culture and has left it all to sit by the sea, watch waves and generally stay sane. He now lives in Chennai, visits his wife in Bangalore, works in New Delhi and New York and holidays in Sweden.



The inner eye is the centre of perception and enquiry, ever alert in the pursuit of what is true.

The De-Jeaning debate

JYOTI RAGHAVAN



The sudden hullaballoo raised over 'de-jeaning' girl students of a Delhi college and in certain other educational institutions across the country, has limited itself to the superficial issue of whether or not to don this popular denim garb. If preventing catcalls and eve-teasing on campuses is the argument then it holds no water, as voyeurs will continue with their voyeuristic ways even if women were draped in conventional Indian attire. Also, if the aim of these de-jean propagandists is to stem the western cultural tide, then banning girls from wearing jeans to college is hardly a solution, for jeans is only one representation of western symbolism and too trivial a cause for alarm. Yet, this minuscule 'de-jean brigade' might find less hostility among the youth if they probably centred their argument on the *swadeshi* slogan—'Be Indian Wear Indian—however pretentious that may sound. 'Be an original, not a clone', could probably be an even less intimidating slogan for the lone voices campaigning against the over-sweep of western influence on Indian lifestyles which the MNCs have indirectly ushered in.

It is important to realise that what is cause for debate is not sporting jeans but liberalisation itself, which today, has come to represent not just the inflow of Coke, Pepsi, McDonalds or other multinational conglomerates, but has gone beyond to imply the importation of a uniform Yankee monoculture that has already spread to most of Europe and South East Asia and is now fast sucking India into its vortex. *The Utne Reader*, an American magazine, in one its issues, brought out a collection of American angst, spelling out the impacts of Yankeeism on local ethnic cultures.

Getting back to the de-jeaning issue, it is well known that jeans are more of a symbol than an attire. What started off as a uniform work code for blue collar workers in the West became symbolic of hippie freedom in the sixties and seventies denoting fierce individualism and rebellion against conventionalism. In India, jeans do not have the same ideological framework. Rather, it represents an almost devotional allegiance to an international trend; the comfort criterion applied to the denim garb being perhaps incidental. Yet there is no denying the fact that jeans have come to stay almost as a choiceless choice. Hence it smacks of antediluvianism to suggest banning jeans from the campus. And when the ban is especially directed at girls, it is nothing but gender bias, almost as if to say that what is good for the gander is not good for the goose.

Would it be too much to ask for an Indian Dress Day, like Republic Day or Independence Day that offers a challenge to MTV? Though, please do not be in a hurry to club me a saffron-right-wing-fundamentalist. I was simply making a point that while de-jeaning is not the answer to neo-colonialism, is it not possible to take this debate beyond denim?

Jyoti Raghavan belongs to the Journalism faculty of the Lady Shri Ram College, New Delhi, and writes regularly for newspapers and magazines.

Illustration: **Rustam Vania**

BOOK REVIEWS

The Disputed Mosque: A Historical Inquiry

Sushil Srivastava

Vistaar Publications, New Delhi, 1991
ISBN 81-7036-212-1
142 pages Rs. 95

Reviewing this important book today may seem like flogging not one, but two dead horses. Not only has the Babri Masjid been demolished, but the book—which mainly addressed the claim that the Ramjanambhumi was located at the Babri Masjid—is itself over five years old. But strangely, re-reading the book remains an engrossing experience. The question it raises, namely, how does one approach the problem of conflicting religious claims remains to haunt us. Srivastava's book can be seen as a way of tackling this question through meticulous historical research into the story of religious conflicts. The history of the Babri Masjid becomes an entry point into a larger history of the rise and fall of religions and their relationships with different states.

Srivastava defines two major moments in the history of the conflict. The first concerns the relationship between the Ramanandi movement and the Avadh state. While Ram *bhatki* began to spread from the twelfth century, it was only in the eighteenth century that the Ramanandis made their presence felt in Ayodhya. In a relatively short time they managed to replace Shaivite influence and began dominating Ayodhya with their *akharas*, growing powerful through the acquisition of land and moneylending. Their success against Shaivites whetted their appetite for more power which was later directed against the Muslims: it was then that the Babri Masjid was claimed to be Ram's birthplace. What is significant was that the Ramanadi success in the eighteenth century was largely due to the patronage of the Avadh state, especially Naval Rai, a minister of Safdar Jung. The promotion of the Ramanadis was part of the policy of the Shia Nawabs of wooing Hindus as counter against Sunnis. This was intensified by the efforts of the Nawabs at distancing themselves from the Sunni Mughal Emperors after the Battle of Buxar in 1765.

However physical conflicts between Hindus and Muslims over the Masjid broke out only after the British took over Ayodhya in 1816. Srivastava traces out a multiplicity of ways in which the British aided the intensification of religious conflict. The first major fight took place in 1853–55 when the Vaishnav *bairagis* forcibly occupied the Masjid. Resulting in counter-action by an influential *maulvi* who gathered an army of Muslims and low castes. While the British refused to intervene, Nawab Wajid Ali Shah sent a regiment against the *maulvi*. Despite the latter's defeat the conflict carried on and resuming again in 1859. This was an important point. The British were keen to placate the *mahants* who had supported them during 1857. Therefore, one of the acts of the district administration was to allow the *mahants* to raise a platform in front of the mosque and put up a grilled fence. The cosy relationship between the *mahants* and the British administration gained more intimacy over time. Significantly, in 1916 the district administration donated funds raised to welcome the Prince of Wales (who did not come) to a local committee for the purpose of putting stone marks before all Hindu religious places in Ayodhya. The committee wasted no time in designating Babri Masjid as Ramjanambhumi, even though the *Ayodhya Mahatyma*—a sixteenth-century book of pilgrimages which provided the knowledge for this exercise—had indicated the *janambhumi/sthan* to lie at Kaushalya Bhavan, a different place altogether!

This did not mean that the *mahants* were putty in the hands of history. In the twentieth century the *Go-rakshini Sabha* consolidated Hindu communalism and riots broke out in Ayodhya. Srivastava details the mythic stories that grew up around the Babri Masjid. These appear to have grown from the late seventeenth century, and were used to suggest that the Ramjanambhumi had a temple built over it by Vikramaditya which Babur, inspired by some Muslim *fakirs*, demolished. Srivastava's handling of myths is superb. Besides testing their claims against historical evidence, he also shows the religio-political circumstances in which they originate and how the serve different power interests. Nor does he take myths lightly. One of the best pieces of Srivastava's analysis is when he maps out the different religious places of Ayodha according to the *Ayodhya Mahatyma*.

History writing can—and does so in *Disputed Mosque*—complicate easy stories of the past, such as the one that says Hindus have always been humiliated by Muslims. Srivastava shows the many sidedness of the past religious conflicts: he concludes, after analyising the partly ambiguous and often erroneous evidence regarding the existence of the Bhumi at the Masjid, that the Masjid could have been erected on the ruins of either a Hindu, Jain or Buddhist temple. The complex recapturing of the past can help to remove the religious vengeance that myths of conflict incite. It shows that such vengeance lacks any real object and reason. Paradoxically this can make us concentrate on living our lives in the present, and in doing so remove the burden of fighting for the past which often clouds our perception of the brutalities and civil strife that religious conflicts generate.

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Politics of Violence: From Ayodhya to Behrampada

Edited by John McGuire, Peter Reeves and Howard Brasted

Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1996,
ISBN 81-7036-596-1
300 pages, Rs. 395

The present volume is a collection of nineteen papers focusing on a theme that threatened the very existence of the Indian republic in December 1992. What makes it interesting is the way it integrates contributions from historians, political scientists, film-makers, lawyers and activists into one voice against what happened.

The first few essays take up the question of violence following the destruction of the Babri Masjid. They concentrate on western India (viz. Bombay and Surat) and northern India (viz. Ayodhya) and examine various issues ranging from the crisis of the economy, criminalisation, political lumpenism under the aegis of the Shiv Sena/BJP to land-grabbing manoeuvres. What is typically symptomatic is the role of the police, who either played a partisan role or landed-up—as in the popular Hindi films—after the orgies of violence were over.

Given the constraints of space I shall focus on some of these essays . Lance Brennan's 'The State and Communal Violence in UP: 1947–1992' seeks to project a historical perspective to what happened in 1992–93. Its significance

lies in the fact that it weaves in three riots in UP: Rohilkhand (1947-48), Moradabad (1980) and Ayodhya (1992). The significance of these riots lies in the way that Ayodhya represents a climax of the 'dialogue' between communal violence and the nature of the Indian state that had started since Independence. For Brennan, the violence in 1947 dashed Nehru's hopes of a secular democracy. As described, the attack on the Babri Masjid illustrates the dangers of a communalised government, when the composite nature of the state—created in the early years after Independence—was under attack.

Flavia Agnes's essay on Behrampada clearly establishes that religious identity was not the issue. She emphasises the logic of slum clearance, Shiv Sena politics, and the police who instead of protecting the Muslims, selectively killed them. Her paper on the women's movement is significant in the way that it shows how the right-wing has (mis)appropriated and re-cast significant aspects of the women's movement centred around specific issues related to gender. She cites the demand for a Common Civil Code which make the BJP/Shiv Sena appear to be the advocates of women's rights while actually attacking the Muslims. Similarly she refers to Hindu women who gave false statements about being raped by Muslim men in a bid to cover-up mass rapes of Muslim women in Surat. Thus she feels that the women's movement needs to learn about the ways in which a woman's gender identity can get subsumed by her communal identity.

In 'The Bombay Riots of January 1993: The Politics of Urban Conflagration', Jim Masselos clearly demonstrates the specificities of these riots which relate to their deep economic impact, their large geographical spread and a virtual collapse of the administration when it came to tackling them. He emphasises class contradictions and exploitation, the role of the Shiv Sena, property dealers and the underworld while discussing the basis of these riots.

Sudhir Chandra's particularly sensitive and consequently extremely disturbing essay makes one wonders whether the BJP can be singularly blamed—though one cannot but see its systematic contribution. As he puts it, riots and the return to peace only deepened/strengthened the sympathy for 'Hindutva' among large sections of the city's Hindu population (p.91). Similarly, his discussion on the feelings about Muslims as a community reveal very clearly the dent made by fascism.

Gyanendra Pandey makes a serious attempt to understand the 'authentic history' created by the Hindu right and its widespread impact. His analysis takes up some of the productions related to this 'history', centred around Ayodhya, which are cheap and short-lived editions sold along with audio-cassettes, posters, images of gods/goddesses, books of common prayer and devotional songs. As emphasised, these are repetitive and present a version based on numbers, dates, etc., of the battles fought by the Hindus to 'liberate' the Ramjanmabhoomi along with the precise numbers of lives which have been 'sacrificed'. Pointing out the significance of numbers, the mixing-up of the religious and the political and the focus on the heroes and villains, Pandey points to the eternal conflict between the Hindus and the Muslims in Indian history that is projected as the central theme of these works. He also points to the dependence on colonial sources, like Cunningham's Lucknow *District Gazetteer* in its search for building this 'authenticity'. The result is the 'worst kind of realist melodrama' (p.155) where everything remains unchanging, unproblematised, with a singular privileging of the 'eternal' Hindu–Muslim conflict. One can perhaps refer to the rather elitist nature of this 'history' and its search for legitimacy with some of the writers being described as 'M.A. and Ph. D. in Archaelogy and History' (p.146).

Pandey raises some relevant issues such as, the secular historian's non-acceptance of difference, and the choice of language/approach, etc., which are an extension of this very problem. He critiques the sharp distinctions made by 'modernists' between religion/history and stresses the importance of recognising the ambiguities and the plurality of meanings, which can vary with contexts. One hopes that this tract is translated and published in some leading Hindi daily of UP.

One can end by drawing attention to the volume's limitations. One relates specifically to Rashmi Desai's 'Witnessing Ayodhya' which unfortunately sees a parallel between the lumpenised marauders termed as *karsevaks* who were travelling from the towns of Gujarat to Ayodhya by train and the Congress volunteers going out to participate in *parishads* and satyagrahas during the anti-imperialist struggle (p.73). The second concerns the role of the editors who should have perhaps organised the articles differently and chosen to keep the historical background at the beginning and start with Brennan's piece. And, finally, it is also worth mentioning that the regions covered for case studies should have included the east (only Calcutta has been examined by Stephen Sherlock) and the south which would have undoubtedly brought out the pluralities much more effectively.

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Saga of Hinduism: Essence of Hinduism Volume 1, Hinduism and Society Volume 2

P.V. Joshi
ISBN 81 7533 044 9 vol1
81 7533 045 7 vol2
81 7533 043 0 set
758 pages Rs. 1400

Hinduism as we know today is largely a western construct. The British orientalists and German sanskritists were overwhelmed when confronted with such an ancient religious tradition. They therefore wanted to discover the innate strength of Hinduism that gave it the resilience to not only survive influences of other religions but to thrive inspite it. On the other hand, latter-day western scholars found the prevalent Hindu societal structure to be casteridden, idolatrous and full of rules and restrictions. Factors which these western scholars found to be inimical to the transition to a rationalistic society (with which they were familiar). Their understanding of Hinduism was radically different from that of the Orientalist. Ronald Inden writes in *Imagining India* that both sets of constructs had a purpose. The orientalists believed that once Hinduism rid itself of the latter-day accretions and forged a link with the 'golden days', then it would be rid of all its problems. Hinduism would be restored to its former glory. Those who found Hinduism to be moribund and hostile to rational thought were looking for arguments justifying British rule in India. Both groups of scholars thought of themselves as torchbearers: While the orientalists were trying to help the Hindus out of the current mess, the other group was trying to introduce western rational thinking to clean what appeared to them as the Augean Stable of Hinduism. The origin of many of the reform movements of the nineteenth and early-twentieth century in India can be traced to either schools of thought. There are some scholars who, feel that those 'who study the history of the Hindu religion more closely

discover such a plurality of religious doctrine and practice within Hinduism that the current practice of subsuming them under one religion appears inadequate' (Heinrich von Stientencron, *Representing Hinduism*).

Is there any logical explanation behind such divergent views on Hinduism? Yes, feels Dr. Joshi, 'Since Hinduism did not originate from any one individual it was to be expected that over the centuries it would evolve into different sects and denominations, holding somewhat divergent beliefs and practicing different rituals. So a foreigner observing this phenomenon might be tempted to conclude that Hinduism does not represent one religion at all but rather a hetrogeneous collection of faiths.' Dr. Joshi feels that behind all these apparent differences lies a solid core which defines the essence of Hinduism.

The first volume of this book tries to explain the essence of Hinduism. This core of Hinduism runs through different expositions of the religion which gave rise to different sects and denominations. This is the belief in the existence of the all-pervasive Brahman who is the creator of the universe and everything in it. But this Bramhan is different from the Biblical concept of God. This Brahman is omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent, and it resides in every living being and every living being resides in the Bramhan. The second belief is the cycle of birth and release from this cycle. All living things undergo this cycle till they are released through merger with the Brahman. To achieve this goal it is necessary to lead a 'virtuous and ethical existence'.

Hinduism, observes Dr. Joshi, is a composite religion. Various thoughts and beliefs many of which are of pre-Vedic origin were incorporated by those whose beliefs the Vedas depict. The Vedas in the process of assimilation and presentation of newer ideas also 'laid the foundation of ethics of Hinduism.' The *Upanishads* represents the rational speculation into the mystery of the universe. Without trying to lay down 'commandments and dogmas based on so-called divine inspiration' the *Upanishads* laid the philosophical foundation of Hinduism and introduced the concept of impersonal Godhead or monism which later became the cornerstone of many a stream of Hindu philosophical thinkers. Dr. Joshi rightly points out that the *Upanishads* often expresses views divergent from those expounded by the Vedas but this was never overplayed. This was possible by moving away from the concept of a personal or clan god—who could bestow riches and happiness if pleased—to an impersonal god, communion with whom was the ultimate goal of human life. The *Puranas* mark the era of integration of the new pantheon of deities which had emerged during the early centuries of the Christian era into Hinduism and may have laid the foundation of what is commonly believed to be idolatry of Hinduism. But this, Dr. Joshi feels, would be an incorrect conclusion. The *Puranas* never contradicted the basic and core belief of Hinduism and its most important contribution lies in the field of ethics. One misses in this discussion, an examination of the possibility that the new gods could have been a return of the Vedic gods in new form, which could have resulted from an urge to return to the Vedic roots and ritualism connected with them.

The second volume, *Hinduism and Society*, is a detailed examination of impact of Hinduism on various facets of society. Dr. Joshi examines various erroneous notions which over a period of time became part of the faith and practices of the Hindus. He clearly demonstrates how and why these notions are without any proper foundation in Hindu religion even when some support for such actions and beliefs could be found in some well accepted religious texts. For example, on the position of women, Dr. Joshi finds that the *Manusmriti* and some passages in some *Puranas* support the extremely rigid position while the Vedas and other sources indicate that the actual situation was totally different. Yet we know that these later day retrograde ideas prevailed. Dr. Joshi rightly observes 'degradation to which large segments of Hindu women were subjected cannot be attributed to only socio-economic developments. Hinduism cannot disown its responsibility'. It will not be out of place to mention that the position of women *vis a vis* men was unfavourable in all societies of the world in the middle ages and after, yet it was probably not as harsh as it was in India and one can understand the author's anguish. For the Hindu women it was a fall from the exulted position they held in the formative period of Hinduism. The chapter on 'Hinduism and Modern India' make interesting reading as it covers impact of various facets of Hinduism in the context of the modern world. For example, Dr. Joshi finds that 'Hinduism could never act as a bond, strong enough to bring together Hindu chiefs, nobles, kings, etc., in different parts of the country, not allowing them to transcend the discord among them on the basis of common religion and culture'. It would be pertinent to point out that if religion could be a basis of political unity Europe should have been one country.

Dr. Joshi after discussing the underlying concepts and examining its relevance to the demands of the modern day, finds that Hinduism strikes 'a neat balance between conflicting demands of materialism and spiritualism ... and shows how God realization remains within the ken of ordinary man'.

The author has given us book on a difficult subject written in a lucid and readable style, but in doing so he does not sacrifice the logical rigour that a book of this genre demands. The book is primarily meant for foreign readers but many Indian readers, I am sure, would love to read and possess this book. This would call for a low priced edition.

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The Gods of Asia: Image, Meaning and Text

T. S. Maxwell

Oxford University Press, 1997
ISBN : 0 19 5637925
260 pages, 71 Plates, Rs. 595

In the early history of manAsia formed a vast breeding ground for civilisation and India formed what may be called cul-de-sac. Here we discover means of studying successive epochs of culture.

The gods of Asia have their origin in the Indian peninsula; whatever may be the religion, the intellectual roots can be traced to the philosophy of the *Upanishads*. In India, philosophy and religion have always been regarded as the essence of all sciences, and origin of all the forces which control life in every aspect. This in turn, resulted in the creation of an iconography and symbolism which gave a mystic dimension to the religious art forms that have an ageless appeal.

'One of the consequent problems in writing about Asian art', notes the author, 'in particular the images of Hinduism and, to a lesser extent, of the more sophisticated schools of Buddhism —is the fact that there is no single static hierarchy of constant deities. According to cult, caste, region and political context the pantheon is seen from different angles with different points of emphasis'. It is important to note that Hinduism is also called *sanatana dharma* meaning religion that for endures all time. The reason for the immortal-

ity of the Vedic religion of Hinduism is that while retaining its spiritual identity, it has been changing its outward form in accordance with the demands of time. The multiple images of Hindu gods and goddesses were necessarily symbols of unity that arose out of crises from time to time.

Ideals of Indian art have common philosophical roots. This is also reflected in common symbolism by Hindu and Buddhist art. The Buddhists have used Hindu deities like Surya and Indra in their art. The use of *mudras* in forming a symbolic language is common to both Hindu as well as Buddhist art. Water is one of the most important symbols for both and so is elephant which could be traced throughout Hindu as well as Buddhist art. The white elephant in particular, which symbolises rain, fortune, longevity and abundance, is important to both. Airawata, the elephant of Indra was white, the elephant of Buddha when he was born as a prince Vessantra was also white. Again, the *naga* (serpent), is a motif common to both Hindu and Buddhist art and is frequently depicted in an attitude of pious devotion on the portals of shrines. The lotus is another symbol shared by the Hindu and Buddhist artists and the lotus goddess Lakshmi adorns early Buddhist monuments. She stands on a lotus pedestal, in a characteristic posture, holding a lotus in her hand flanked by elephants dousing her with water. Zimmer rightly notes: 'It is extremely important to observe that the Buddhist and the Hindu representations of such popular divinities do not differ from each other, either essentially or in detail, for Buddhist or Hindu art—as also Buddhist or Hindu doctrine were in India, basically one.' The same holds good for Jaina art as well. It is indeed necessary to study the Indian art in a chronological manner because all religions and sects have their roots in the *Upanishadic* philosophy which assumed iconographic and symbolic vocabulary during subsequent periods.

In the art philosophy of India, the underlying religious ideals are contained in the doctrine of the three paths leading to salvation —the way of work (*karma-marga*), the way of devotion (*bhakti-marga*) and the way of knowledge (*jnana-marga*). The path of faith together with devotion to work, was ideally adopted by Indian artists and craftsmen with a religious zeal that resulted in creation of a unique art treasure.

In India, we have a unique synthesis of philosophy, religion and aesthetic sensibilities that combined together to create a fine civilisation. The three main aspects of Hindu worship—*ishta devata*, or divinity of the self, *grihya devata* or divinity of the household, and the *gramya devata* or divinity of the village—correspond to the ancient tradition of Vedic sacrifices, in which the head of the Aryan household had a three-fold religious duty to perform towards his God, his family and his tribe. The *sandhya* or daily ritual of the Brahmin, performed at sunrise, noon and sunset, also belongs to the traditions of Aryan religion, in which the sun was worshipped as a symbol of Unknown Power in the universe, governing all other natural powers. The tradition is reflected in the organisation of the Aryan village in which the path surrounding the village was consecrated for the performance of the rite of *pradakshina*, symbolising the path of the sun across the heavens or the turning point of the wheel of life or death. The same symbolism is evident in the planning of Buddhist stupas and the Hindu and Jain temples.

It must be realised that in India, temples not only symbolise the universe but man himself as a microcosm and a 'holy temple' or 'City of God' (*brahmapura*). The body, the temple, and the universe being thus analogous.

The temple is conceived as a universe as a likeness, a cosmic *purusha*. Its dark interior is occupied only by a single image or symbol of informing spirit, while externally its walls are covered with representations of the Divine Powers in all their manifested multiplicity. In visiting the shrine, one proceeds inwards from multiplicity to unity, just as in contemplation. One passes through this distinction between the outer world and the inner shrine, the symbolic source and the point of convergence (*bindu*) of all the exterior imagery, the *garbha griha*, 'so as to be born again from its dark womb'. This metaphysical purpose behind temple design was continuation of *Upanishadic* religious analogy, in which the *atman*, or the aspect of the eternal Brahman in the individual was likened to an embryo within the womb (*garbha*). Thus Hindus regard a temple as a centre of powerful forces which are potentially dangerous to the uninitiated who blunder into its field of influence without due reverence or ritual protection. The temple in south India is often a self-contained organic unit and some are like miniature towns. It is to be noted that while in the north the main tower of the Indian temple is built over the *garbha griha* which is in the centre of the temple complex, in south India it is raised over the entrance gateways (*gopurams*) and is the most conspicuous feature of the temple seen from the outside. T. S. Maxwell writes, 'The location of the shrine room is always marked by the *shikhara* or spire which rises directly above it and which in south India is often carved with images of the Gods ...'. He states that, 'Virtually all Hindu temples throughout South and South-East Asia are composed of at least some of these elements, the basic unit being the *garbha griha* surmounted by a *shikhara*'. These erroneous statements mar the excellent reading on 'House of the God'.

The ground plan of an Indian temple is a *yantra*, a mystical or symbolic geometrical diagram indicating the basic energies of the natural world which are represented by the deities. A *yantra* starts with a *bindu* (a point or a mysterious matrix) placed in the centre. The *bindu* signifies the Universal Force or Thought. Because 'when power becomes infinitely intensive or concentrated, its position is called *bindu* or point'.

Yantras are employed as 'aids' to worship and meditation and as a cosmographical ground-plan for temple architecture. Every measurement is determined by scientific laws of proportion to put the structure in harmony with the mystical numerical basis of the universe and of time itself. The spiritual ascent of the worshipper is from circumference inwards, the highest state being the centre. *Yantras* are the necessary basis to all attempts at symbolic representations, all sacred forms, all images, all sacred architecture, altars, temples and ritual gestures. Each deity has its own *yantra* in meditation. The great temple at Borbudur is a classic example of the use of the *Srichakrayantra* in a built form.

The mathematical relations underlying every work of art are important, since each icon also fulfills the function of *yantra* which serves as a means to attain realisation or moksha. 'Hindu iconographic art, like modern cubism joins mathematics with aesthetics', says Havell in his *Indian Sculpture and Painting*, 'In the *yantra* it shows the impersonal form of the Godhead developing mathematically from the centrepoint (*bindu*)'.

Again, the depiction of female form in the sculptural art of India raises curiosity. The significance lies not merely in its rich symbolism and attempts to create super-sensuous norms of beauty, but even more in its abstract formal rhythms and movements. It must be realised that the aim of Indian art is not just evoke sensuous delight. Reality, instead of being veiled, is simply idealised.

The book deals with the art of all Indian religions which form the core of religious art in Asia. The author has attempted to interpret art through religious traditions and has largely succeeded in providing an immensely readable narrative for scholars and non-specialists alike.

Prabhakar Begde is a practising architect, writer, architectural historian, columnist and Indologist. He is the author of *Ancient* and *Medieval Town Planning in India, Forts and Palaces of India, Living Sculpture*. He is also a Visiting Faculty at TVB School of Habitat Studies, New Delhi.

Representing Hinduism: The Construction of Religious Traditions and National Identity

Edited by Vasudha Dalmia and Heinrich von Stietencron

Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1995
ISBN 81 7036 422 1
467 pages Rs. 475

The academic context in which nineteen of the twenty-one contributions contained in this book were made has been stated at its outset. The opening sentence informs us that 'an international group of scholars collected in the lofty chambers of a hill-top in Tubingen to trace and argue out the nineteenth and twentieth century construction of Hinduism', even while the Babri Masjid at Ayodhya was being threatened by demolition. For those readers however, who do succeed in ignoring the barely suppressed arrogance of the above statement, this book does contain several interesting and important papers.

Two of the three contributions in Part 1 are concerned with demonstrating how western Indology, itself a by-product of the establishment of colonial domination in India, (mis)read and manipulated aspects of India's social and religious heritage. Friedhelm Hardy's analysis of the *Ahcaryahrdayam*, a thirteenth century Tamil text, which tried to establish the correspondence of the four works of Nammalvar with the four Vedas, demonstrates the problems that this creates for an essentialist Indological construction. Geeta Dharampal-Frick's exploration tries to do this with reference to the discourse on caste as contained in medieval accounts of India. We are however not told about the context in which cosmographers like Sebastian Franck, whose writings Frick takes so seriously, wrote. Did Franck ever come to India or did he like his more famous countryman Max Mueller also choose to write on the Indian social order without ever visiting the sub-continent?

Part II with its multitude of nineteenth-century reconstructions effectively demonstrates that while confrontations between western traditions and nineteenth century India took place in an unequal colonial contexts, the resulting currents and counter-currents cannot be simply read off from a single perspective. Some papers— the nationalisation of Hinduism as evident in a set of school textbooks on Indian history from nineteenth century court cases i.e., the Maharaja libel case (Jurgen Lutt) and the Dadaji Bhikajis vs. Rukhmabai case (Sudhir Chandra)—seek to argue that contemporary notions of classical Indian tradition were forged in the peculiar nineteenth century context of British colonialism. At the same time, as Sudipta Kaviraj's masterful analysis of Bhudev Mukhopadhyay's *Samajik Prabandha*, with its critique of western social theory and exposition of the historicity of traditions, demonstrates, there were also indigenous responses that cannot be so simply straightjacketed into the formulation of 'a classical Indian tradition'. Ram Bapat's most excellent contribution to this volume suggests a similar complexity. Among other things, through his evocative portraiture, Pandita Ramabai's life (1858–1922) appears as having occupied a liminal zone, with her rejection of Hindu religion and Brahmanical patriarchy and aiming to empower women in the spiritual, not in the material domain.

In Part III (Images and Counter- images in the Twentieth Century) and Part IV (The Performing Arts and the Formation of a Pan-Indian 'Hindu' Tradition), the present century becomes the focus of discussion. Gyan Pandey's incisive analysis of several Hindu histories of Ayodhya, written between 1986 and 1990, stands out as does Dieter Conrad's *tour de force* of the enactment of the 'Hindu code' of 1955 – 56. Some of the contributions, however, sit uneasily with the main theme of the volume as, for instance, the forging of a collective identity among sections of Hyderabad Muslims through the Ittehadul Muslimeen (Javeed Alam) and the conception of Hindus, Muslims and Nirankaris in the militant discourses of Sikhs (Veena Das). I also find the late Gunther Sontheimer's paper on the erosion of folk religion in modern India too, general. More seriously, I view the editorial comments on this paper by Dalmia and Stietencron—that folk tradition have been eroded mainly by 'the universalizing, global aspirations of Hinduism'—with grave suspicion. There is nothing in Sontheimer's paper which suggests this. On the contrary, the erosion of folk culture is viewed as the product of contemporary social and economic forces—'Folk religion, if not folk culture, and last but not least tribal culture, has lost its moorings and its, one may say, horizontal cosmos of the village and the forest' (Sontheimer, p.397).

This book undoubtedly has an important academic and political message modern attempts at simplifying and polarising India's religious history and Hinduism in particular have obscured the pluralities and diversities that have been an integral part of it. At the same time, as soon as one moves out of urban Delhi and Tubingen castles, even now it is possible to observe flourishing ground level religious and social phenomena with shared norms, tolerances and convergences. Such images forcefully demonstrate that pluralities are still a part of Hinduism and are not mere 'have beens'! More than anything else, they make us realise better that modern politicians and academicians have not yet succeeded in divesting Hinduism of its enormously varied strands. That such images find no space in this volume is its major drawback.

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